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## About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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# Islamist Militant Groups in Post-Qadhafi Libya

By Alison Pargeter



Libyans celebrate the second anniversary of the Libyan uprising at Martyrs Square on February 17, 2013, in Tripoli. - AFP/Getty Images

**I**N JULY 2012, Libya held its first national elections since the fall of Mu`ammar Qadhafi. The Libyan people, however, appeared to buck the trend of the Arab Spring by not electing an Islamist<sup>1</sup> parliament. Although Islamists are present in the newly-elected General National Congress, they are just one force among many competing in the political arena.<sup>2</sup> While Islamists have not succeeded in dominating Libya's nascent political scene, they have come to represent an ever growing and influential force on the ground. A number of Islamist groups

and currents have emerged in the post-Qadhafi era, including those at the extreme end of the spectrum that have taken advantage of central authority weakness by asserting power in their own local areas. This is particularly the case in the east of the country, which has traditionally been associated with Islamist activism.

Given the murky and chaotic nature of Libya's transition, which has prompted the mushrooming of local power brokers, it is difficult to distinguish between many of the Islamist militant groups and brigades. While some groups, such as the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade or the February 17 Brigade, are operating, nominally at least, within the official structures of the state, others, such as Ansar al-Shari'a,<sup>3</sup> are

1 The term "Islamist" refers to those who engage in political activism articulated through an Islamic discourse. This does not necessarily mean those who espouse violence.

2 The Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party, for example, secured a significant presence in the congress and is now part of the recently appointed government.

3 Ansar al-Shari'a (Partisans of Shari'a) has emerged as

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functioning independently. Despite the fact that the state attempted to dissolve these independent militant brigades following the public protests that erupted in response to the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi in September 2012, these groups continue to operate and impose their authority in their communities. This poses particular challenges for Libya as it moves through the transition process.

This article examines the nature of some of the Islamist militant groups active in the east of Libya, including Ansar al-Shari'a, as well as their relationship with the state. It argues that while these militant groups are largely working within the confines of the state, this cooperation could quickly turn to confrontation if the formation of the constitution does not develop the way that they expect.

#### **"By Night We Are Benghaziistan"**

The growing influence of Islamist militant elements has prompted particular concern among local residents in the east. On December 28, 2012, Benghazi residents staged another demonstration calling for the dissolution of the Islamist militias in the city, holding banners that declared, "By day we are Benghazi, by night we are Benghaziistan."<sup>4</sup>

Authorities suspect that Islamist militant groups are behind the deadly string of night attacks and assassinations that have rocked the east in recent months. The near weekly bombings and assassinations have been aimed almost exclusively at members of the security forces, many of whom defected from Qadhafi's regime at

the time of the revolution.<sup>5</sup> This includes figures such as the former director of Benghazi security, Colonel Faraj Mohammed al-Drissi, who was killed on November 21, 2012.<sup>6</sup> Given the nature of the targets, it is widely assumed that the attacks are the work of Islamist militant forces seeking revenge for the suppression they experienced at the hands of the former regime.

Despite the ongoing violence, the official bodies of the state have been slow to react or to bring the guilty parties to justice. They did, however, arrest Majdi Zwai (also known as Majdi Dhub), a member of the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade, on charges of having assassinated al-Drissi.<sup>7</sup> In December 2012, the Shabab Libya channel reported that Zwai had confessed not only to al-Drissi's killing, but to the killings of other officials.<sup>8</sup> He also reportedly implicated a number of key Islamist militants operating in the region in the assassinations.<sup>9</sup> On December 16, 2012, however, a group of armed gunmen, believed to be from the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade, attacked the police station that held Majdi Zwai.<sup>10</sup> Zwai was freed after a three hour gun battle that left four policemen dead.<sup>11</sup>

5 In the week of January 10-17, 2013, for example, two policemen were killed in two separate bomb attacks in Benghazi and there was also an attempted assassination against the Italian consul-general in the city, Guido de Sanctis. See "Curfew Mulled for Benghazi," *Libya Herald*, January 17, 2013.

6 Kareem Fahim, "Security Chief in Benghazi Assassinated, Libyan Says," *New York Times*, November 21, 2012.

7 The Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade is one of the largest Islamist brigades in the east and is believed to number around 1,000 members. It is named after a young engineer, Rafallah al-Sahati, who was killed by the regime on March 19, 2011, during what is known as the battle of Quwarsha in the west of Benghazi. The brigade is based in the Hawari neighborhood of Benghazi and is led by prominent Islamist Ismail al-Salabi. The brigade comes under the authority of the Libyan Defense Ministry. Its headquarters was stormed by protestors after the attack on the U.S. Consulate in September 2012. See Ibrahim Majbari and Dominique Soguel, "Islamists Flee as Angry Libyans Storm Benghazi Compound," *Agence France-Presse*, September 22, 2012; "Rafallah Sahati, the Martyr Swore that Qadhafi's Army Would Never Enter Benghazi," *New Quryna*, March 19, 2012.

8 "An Armed Attack on a Police Station to Free 'Al-Dhub,'" *Libya al-Jadidah*, December 17, 2012.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

There is a strong feeling in the east that the central authorities, as well as the Islamist-dominated local authorities, are engaged in a cover-up and are pandering to militant elements.<sup>12</sup> Such suggestions may be exaggerated. The central authorities remain weak and unable to properly project authority. Despite the repeated efforts to bolster

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the national army, the government and the General National Congress remain largely at the mercy of the militias. This fact was highlighted following the attack on the Ain Amenas gas plant in Algeria in January 2013, when in its rush to secure its borders and energy facilities, the government had to enlist the help of the secular-oriented Zintan militia in the west of the country.<sup>13</sup>

Yet although the ruling authorities may be unable to stem the violence in the east, there is also a reticence on their part to challenge Islamist elements in any substantive or sustained way. Unlike in neighboring countries, such as Tunisia and Egypt, where the Arab Spring revolutions were largely peaceful, Islamist militant elements in Libya have a legitimacy born out of the position that they played in the struggle. Islamist militants comprising former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and other radical movements, as well as jihadists who spent time in Iraq and Afghanistan, played key roles

a significant force in eastern Libya since the toppling of the former regime. It is more of a group or current than a specific militia or brigade, and it has "branches" in both Benghazi and Derna. Like its counterparts in Tunisia and Yemen, its adherents follow an extremist ideology. Although the Libyan group insists it is not linked to al-Qa`ida, its leader in Benghazi, Mohammed Ali al-Zahawi, has expressed his approval of al-Qa`ida's strategy as well as statements issued by Ayman al-Zawahiri. See "Meeting Mohammad Ali al-Zahawi of Libyan Ansar al-Sharia," BBC, September 18, 2012.

4 *Libya Focus*, January 2013. This demonstration was a follow-up to the "Save Benghazi Friday" protests held after the killing of the U.S. ambassador to Libya in September 2012.

12 On December 28, 2012, for example, protesters accused the authorities and the local council of being engaged in a cover-up. See *Libya Focus*, January 2013.

13 "Libya Reinforces Border, Oilfields After Algeria Attack," Reuters, January 23, 2013.



in the effort to bring down the Qadhafi regime. It was these elements, rather than the country's new political elite, who made sacrifices to effect change. As a result, these militant elements (like all Libya's revolutionaries) are imbued with an aura that gives them a special status and autonomy.

Moreover, these militant elements have proved crucial in providing security in the post-Qadhafi era. Given the power vacuum that accompanied the fall of the former regime, the central authorities have had little choice but to rely on Islamist brigades and units to help keep the peace in certain regions, particularly in the east where the national army has a limited presence. This includes not only those brigades that come under the rubric of the official security structure, but also those that are operating independently. It was notable, for example, that following the attempted dissolution of all Islamist militant brigades in September 2012, staff at the Jala'a Hospital in Benghazi demanded that Ansar al-Shari'a be permitted to continue operating as their security force.<sup>14</sup> One doctor at the hospital told journalists that security provided by Ansar al-Shari'a was better than what was currently available.<sup>15</sup>

#### Charitable Works

In addition to the role they played in the revolution, Islamist militant groups have become part of the fabric of Libyan society in other ways as well.

Unlike groups such as al-Qa'ida, many of these radicals are not necessarily regarded as completely alien or antithetical to the local culture. As the *Washington Post* recently observed, "Ansar al-Shari'a is edging back into society, and many of Benghazi's residents now say they want it here."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Libyan government spokesman Essam al-Zubeir explained, "The people attacked Ansar al-Sharia a few months ago because they were angry. But now they're asking them to come back because there is no police and no real military...Until the country is able

to rebuild the police and military, the people prefer to be protected by their own people."<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, while some of these groups have indulged in the destruction of a number of Sufi shrines as well as cemeteries in the name of eliminating any sign of polytheism, they have so far largely refrained from *takfir*, the practice of excommunicating fellow Muslims. Rather, these groups have responded to the changing political environment by trying to demonstrate their usefulness to society and to spread their rigid ideas through charitable works.<sup>18</sup> There are elements still engaged in jihad, and these groups clearly reject democracy as an ungodly and Western concept, yet for the most part they are demonstrating a willingness to work with the state rather than against it, at least at this time.

This is particularly the case with Ansar al-Shari'a,<sup>19</sup> which in line with the recent teachings of Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti, the Mauritanian preacher who serves as a spiritual reference for many extremists, has been focusing its efforts on charitable works. Much in the style of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ansar al-Shari'a members now provide social services such as welfare support, cleaning and repairing roads, and handing out alms during Ramadan.<sup>20</sup> Ansar al-Shari'a has come out into the open and is taking advantage of the lack of security to assert its authority in the *Hay Shabia* (popular neighborhoods) in the country's eastern cities. It was even reported in January 2013 that Ansar al-Shari'a had established its own "security gate" at Quwarsha at the western entrance to Benghazi, which, according to the group's leader, Mohammed Ali al-Zahawi, was erected not only to assist with security, but also to carry out health checks on citizens to ensure that disease was not being brought into the city.<sup>21</sup>

Part of the reason for this shift away from jihad and toward public works is related to the upcoming battle for the constitution. While there is a broad consensus in Libya that Shari'a will be the primary source of legislation, there are strong differences of opinion over the extent to which Islamic law should be implemented. There are

**"If developments do not proceed the way that the Islamist militant groups expect, and if Shari'a is not implemented in full, then these elements may take violent action to alter the course of events."**

some Libyans, including supporters of the country's more liberal political currents, who want Shari'a to be one source of legislation, but who are against it being implemented in its fullest sense.<sup>22</sup> The Islamist militant groups, on the other hand, are pushing for Shari'a to be instituted in the constitution in its entirety. At a meeting in October 2012, for example, hundreds of supporters of Ansar al-Shari'a and other radical currents came together at the Ansar Mosque in Benghazi to establish the Islamic Assembly for Shari'a, an organization aimed at "activating the rule of Allah so it becomes a visible presence in the country."<sup>23</sup>

As Libyan Islamist scholar Salim al-Sheikhi described, the Islamist militant groups are not waging war against the state but instead are waiting to see how the constitution develops.<sup>24</sup> For al-Sheikhi, the call by these militants for the full implementation of Shari'a is "a just demand because they are the ones who led a large part of the fighting. We don't need to treat them with less loyalty."<sup>25</sup>

14 "Benghazi Hospital Staff Want Ansar al-Sharia Back," *Libya Herald*, October 4, 2012.

15 Ibid.

16 "Islamist Militia Edging Back into Benghazi," *Washington Post*, February 17, 2013.

17 Ibid.

18 For example, providing welfare support and maintaining public infrastructure.

19 For a profile of Ansar al-Shari'a, see footnote 3.

20 "Ansar Shari'a: The Forms of al-Qa'ida's Response to Democratic Transformation in the Arab World," *al-Hayat*, January 3, 2013.

21 "Ansar al-Shari'a is Setting Up a Laboratory at the Quwarsha Gate," *Press Solidarity*, January 20, 2013.

22 This assessment is based on the author's personal observations.

23 "Ansar al-Shari'a in Libya: Putting Weapons Aside in Favor of Political Involvement," *Libya al-Mostakbal*, October 14, 2012.

24 "Religious Affairs in Libya," *al-Jazira*, December 18, 2012.

25 Ibid.

Yet if developments do not proceed the way that the Islamist militant groups expect, and if Shari`a is not implemented in full, then these elements may take violent action to alter the course of events. They may decide to declare jihad against the state to replace what they deem to be a Westernized political system with an Islamic one. Given the power that these groups have been able to amass since the toppling of the former regime, such an outcome could prove disastrous for the new Libya and its transition to a functioning democratic state.

#### Sympathy Within the State

The development of Libya's legal framework could become even more complicated given that the official religious establishment, as well as certain elements within the state, shares with the militants the same uncompromising view of the constitution. The influential Dar al-Ifta (Fatwa House), the highest religious authority in Libya, issued a statement at the end of November 2012 stipulating that not only should Shari`a be the source of legislation, but that any ruling that goes against Shari`a should be considered "null and void."<sup>26</sup> The statement also declared that the article in the constitution dealing with Shari`a is not something that can be put to the people in a referendum because the ruling of Allah stands above that of the people.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in December, Ghaith al-Fakhry, the deputy to Libya's grand mufti, Shaykh Sadeq al-Ghariani, declared, "The Libyan state should stand on two pillars: the constitution that establishes Allah's rule and the just ruler who will apply the constitution."<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the views of the official religious establishment on the constitution are close to those of the Islamist militant groups. The religious establishment has displayed a strong degree of sympathy for these militant elements, even lobbying the government on their behalf. At the government's first formal cabinet meeting held in

November 2012, al-Ghariani urged Libya's new rulers to bring Islamist militants into the fold by acceding to their demands. The mufti declared that Libya did not possess "any groups that we should be scared of," adding that "if we can give them what they want, such as the application of Shari`a law, but if we can do it by degrees, [then] we can bring them to our side... We should bring them to our side with good words and promises that we will do what they want, but in stages."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, al-Ghariani issued a *fatwa* against participating in the Benghazi protests in December 2012 that called for the dissolution of the country's Islamist militant groups.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, January 2013 saw a major union of parts of the establishment and militant groups in the east. On January 4-5, the local Benghazi council, the Libyan Association for Mosque Speakers and Preachers, and the Warriors' Affairs Committee organized a special security conference for the east.<sup>31</sup> Local security bodies such as the Benghazi Security Directorate and the Benghazi intelligence services attended the meeting, as well as the various brigades that come under the interior and defense ministries, including those with an Islamist orientation. A number of militant brigades also attended, including Ansar al-Shari`a and the Abu Slim Martyrs Brigade. The participants issued a statement at the end of the conference, which declared that the implementation of Shari`a was not up for debate and that the grand mufti was above criticism.<sup>32</sup> Even more controversially and in an indication of the extent to which the establishment in the east is sympathetic to the militant brigades, the statement also called for an official investigation into those who had organized the "Save Benghazi Friday" protests against the Islamist militant brigades.<sup>33</sup>

#### Conclusion

Libya's Islamist militant groups are not operating in a vacuum. They have become an integral part of the new Libya and have a key stake in the country's future. Although Libya did not elect an Islamist-dominated government, these militant forces comprise a crucial component of the complex array of forces and powerbrokers that are dominating on the ground in post-Qadhafi Libya. Such elements have always been part and parcel of Libya, however repressed they may have been, and it is little surprise that they are exercising their strength now that the Qadhafi regime is gone.

While these elements appear to be largely working with rather than against the state, their power and legitimacy is such that if they feel their demands are not being met—especially in regard to the formation of the new constitution—they will become a serious force for instability in the longer term.

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26 "Libya Dar al-Ifta Council Issues Statement at the End of its Second Meeting," Libya al-Mostakbal, November 25, 2012.

27 Ibid.

28 "Libya's Mufti: The New Libyan Constitution Must Apply Shari`a Rulings," *al-Watan al-Libyea*, December 22, 2012.

29 "Government Signals New Era of Transparency as First Formal Cabinet Meeting Opened to the Press," *Libya Herald*, November 21, 2012.

30 "Ghariani Says Libya Faces 'Many Challenges,'" *Libya Herald*, December 30, 2012.

31 "The Final Statement of the Revolutionary Brigades and Security Bodies Conference in Benghazi," al-Manara, January 6, 2013.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

## Yemen's Use of Militias to Maintain Stability in Abyan Province

By Casey L. Coombs

IN 2011, MILITANTS from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Ansar al-Shari`a secured control of Abyan Province in southern Yemen.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, Yemen's military reclaimed much of Abyan after launching Operation Golden Swords in May and June, clearing AQAP and Ansar al-Shari`a fighters out of the territory's main population centers.<sup>2</sup> Since then, a patchwork of state-backed local militias, or Popular Committees, in Abyan has emerged as the frontline security force against the insurgent al-Qa`ida affiliates that governed the area for more than a year.

The Popular Committees' ability to hold Abyan has proven crucial to interim Yemeni President Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi, who is leading the country through a volatile political transition following Yemen's 2011 Arab Spring uprisings that unseated President Ali Abdullah Salih.<sup>3</sup> If Hadi can preserve this alliance until early 2014, when parliamentary and presidential elections are scheduled to mark the conclusion of the transition period, Abyan's militias could translate into valuable political influence in the

southern province. If they are pulled into local conflicts or are co-opted by political rivals, however, Abyan's Popular Committees could present a new set of challenges for the embattled president.

This article examines the double-edged role of Abyan's Popular Committees in Hadi's efforts to prepare Yemen's divided populace for democratic elections in 2014, while fighting al-Qa`ida insurgents around the country. After profiling Abyan's disparate network of Popular Committees and outlining the events that led to their proliferation, this article highlights the economic insecurity that fosters shifting loyalties in Abyan. That reality, combined with the potential for Popular Committees to spark new conflicts in Abyan unrelated to al-Qa`ida, underlines the need to secure the loyalty of the militias to guard against their co-optation by rival political factions and to ensure that the militias limit the use of force to Ansar al-Shari`a and AQAP.

### Abyan's Patchwork Militias

In April 2012, about two months after Hadi won office in a single-candidate election and a month before he launched Operation Golden Swords, local tribal militias and government troops in Abyan's north-central town of Lawdar defeated Ansar al-Shari`a insurgents in a bloody, week-long battle for control of the city.<sup>4</sup> Hadi and Defense Minister Mohammed Nasser Ahmed Ali—both Abyan natives—immediately stepped up the provision of arms and other resources to Lawdar's Popular Committees and intensified the lobbying of tribal and religious leaders around Abyan to organize similar militias.<sup>5</sup> By early July, Popular Committees patrolled checkpoints in and around most of Abyan's main cities, from Mudiya east of Lawdar southward to the coastal town of Shuqra and west to the provincial capital Zinjibar and neighboring Jaar.<sup>6</sup>

The diverse composition of Abyan's Popular Committees reflects political and tribal relations that have evolved since the 1994 civil war in which longtime strongman Ali Abdullah Salih's Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in Sana`a defeated the Aden-based People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) to form the Republic of Yemen.<sup>7</sup> According to a Popular Committee commander in Lawdar, "the committees do not belong to any particular party. They are composed of all political factions, including Hiraak, Islahis, Salafis and Sunnis."<sup>8</sup> A local journalist from Abyan described the militias in similar terms: "Some of the Popular Committees are affiliated with the Islah Party, others are pure GPC or Socialist (YSP) and others are members of Hiraak."<sup>9</sup> Mohammed Ali Ahmed, a leading Hiraak figure who returned to Yemen last year after 18 years in exile, has backed Popular Committee forces in his native Lawdar as part of a political arrangement with Hadi.

border—they are most prevalent in Abyan. Furthermore, as a local analyst pointed out: "Abyan is a strategic area for AQAP and Ansar al-Shari`a since it was mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, which said, 'Out of Aden-Abyan will come 12,000, giving victory to the [religion of] Allah and His Messenger. They are the best between me and them.' Geographically, the area is also very strategic as it is located in the middle of southern and northern Yemeni governorates. It is also open on the Arabian Sea." See personal interview, Yemeni political analyst, Sana`a, Yemen, August 7, 2012.

7 Abyan was part of the PDRY. For a detailed discussion of escalating tensions between north and south Yemen since the 1994 civil war, and their impact on today's political transition, see "Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question," International Crisis Group, October 20, 2011. According to that report, "the war laid to rest the notion of unity and ushered in a period of Northern occupation of the South....According to this account, Southerners became second-class citizens at best and, at worst—and in its proponents' words—slaves of the Northern elites."

8 Personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Lawdar in Abyan Province, Sana`a, Yemen, November 5, 2012. Hiraak, or the Southern Movement, is a broad coalition of disaffected southerners from the former PDRY. Hiraak's interests range from the promotion of equal rights among northern and southern populations, to the redress of past grievances to full secession from Yemen's Sana`a-based government. Islah is Yemen's main opposition party, composed of tribesmen, businessmen, Yemen's version of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists.

9 Personal interview, Yemeni journalist from Abyan, Sana`a, Yemen, February 7, 2013. The GPC is Yemen's ruling political party.

1 The U.S. State Department considers Ansar al-Shari`a an alias of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. For more information on the origins of Ansar al-Shari`a and its relation to AQAP, see Fernando Carvajal, "Deepening Crises Breed Local Support for Ansar al-Sharia: Part 1," *Fair Observer*, July 3, 2012.

2 Personal interview, Yemeni intelligence official, Abyan, Yemen, July 2, 2012.

3 The Gulf Cooperation Council-negotiated political transition initiative is backed by the United States and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). See Security Council Report, Yemen, available at [www.securitycouncilreport.org/yemen/](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/yemen/). For an unofficial English translation of the GCC agreement, see "Next Steps in Yemen's Transition," International Foundation for Electoral Systems Briefing Paper, March 2012. Hadi's two greatest challenges at present are enforcing military reforms and commencing the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). Despite three rounds of military restructuring decrees, the most powerful branches of Yemen's fractured armed forces remain under the command of feuding elites. Meanwhile, ongoing delays to the start of the NDC, a crucial stage in the transition at which the country's numerous rival factions are expected to agree on the structure of a new government, have fueled political insecurity.

4 "Ansar al Sharia Shells Lawdar with Artillery and Tanks," *Mareb Press*, April 11, 2012.

5 Personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Lawdar in Abyan Province, Sana`a, Yemen, November 5, 2012.

6 The scope of this article is limited to Abyan's Popular Committees. Although anti-al-Qa`ida militias patrol surrounding provinces—particularly Lahj to the west, northern Bayda and Shabwa along Abyan's northeastern

The motivations for joining Abyan's Popular Committees vary widely. Enlisted Yemeni military and security forces struck a deal with the Ministry of Defense to return to their hometowns in Abyan with their salaries to fight for the Popular Committees.<sup>10</sup> Other militiamen in Abyan claimed they were duty-bound to take up arms in the security void left in the wake of Operation Golden Swords, as most state forces deployed elsewhere and some lingering units revolted against Hadi's military reforms. "We have never demanded anything from the government; we are fighting for the sake of Allah," a Popular Committee member from Lawdar said. "Our support comes from the people of Lawdar and our aim is to maintain security and stability in Lawdar."<sup>11</sup>

Many attribute the rapid propagation of Popular Committees in Abyan to the monthly stipends, government jobs and other perks offered by Yemen's Ministry of Defense in the poverty-stricken province.<sup>12</sup> A government official in Abyan argued that dismal economic conditions in the province enabled Ansar al-Shari'a's populist promises to take root, despite the group's affiliation with al-Qa`ida. "They need to eat, so where can they go?" he said. "Ansar had them in a corner."<sup>13</sup>

That desperation, according to an Abyani tribal shaykh, fuels unpredictability in the province. He distrusts the Popular Committees because many of them were allied with Ansar al-Shari'a less than a year ago. "They joined [Popular Committees] for

the salaries and only when it was clear Ansar al-Shari'a would be driven from the province," he said.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most high-profile defector from Ansar al-Shari'a is Abdul Latif al-Sayed, a leading Popular Committee commander based in Batis village north of Jaar. He has survived at least five assassination attempts since his defection from Ansar al-Shari'a in 2011.<sup>15</sup>

A journalist who regularly reports from Abyan argued that this survivalist mentality will lead to problems for the government. "It is true that the Popular Committees had a big role in shrinking Ansar al-Shari'a and AQAP, but they do not want al-Qa`ida to disappear from the scene," he said. "The Popular Committees do not want to end the existence of al-Qa`ida because they know that will end the investment in fighting them. There are huge amounts of money being paid for the Popular Committees and other parties in the name of fighting al-Qa`ida."<sup>16</sup>

From the leadership down through the rank-and-file, Abyan's Popular Committees are keenly aware of their value to Hadi and international powers backing Yemen's political transition. According to one Yemeni scholar, the Popular Committees "want to extract as much as possible from this situation, and the threat from Ansar al-Shari'a and AQAP will ensure that Hadi relies on them for a longer period of time."<sup>17</sup>

#### Tribal Disputes

Complex tribal tensions in Abyan complicate the role of Popular Committees. One political analyst in Sana'a warned that the armed militias may commit violent acts against their enemies under the pretense of fighting al-Qa`ida.<sup>18</sup>

A recent conflict between Popular Committee forces and Shaykh Tariq al-Fadhli, the leader of a powerful tribe in

Abyan, highlighted the potential for the autonomous militias to commit violence against enemies using the justification of fighting Islamist militants. In November 2012, militiamen from Zinjibar encircled al-Fadhli's home days after he returned from a long absence. Militiamen accused the shaykh of spreading rumors that Popular Committees were "mercenaries" and said that al-Fadhli maintained ties to al-Qa`ida.<sup>19</sup> The subsequent two-day siege, in which two of the shaykh's guards were killed and several injured, ended only after Hadi, who belongs to a sub-tribe of al-Fadhli's, intervened on his behalf and arranged safe haven

**"In Yemen's experience, the long-term consequence of arming and funding local militias to do the bidding of the state is that they amass enough power to challenge the state."**

for him and his family in Aden "on the government's dime."<sup>20</sup> Al-Fadhli said he enjoyed the support of the popular forces in Jaar, but the Zinjibar militias were against him.<sup>21</sup>

In the same month, Popular Committee forces from Jaar shot dead a suspected al-Qa`ida member who belonged to the Yafa` tribe.<sup>22</sup> According to a Yemeni journalist who reported from Jaar during this period, Popular Committee commander Abdul Latif al-Sayed attempted to deescalate the situation by offering blood money, or *diyya*, for the murder. The Yafa` leadership instead opted for revenge, or *tha`r*, he said.<sup>23</sup>

10 Personal interview, Yemeni journalist from Abyan, Sana'a, Yemen, February 7, 2013.

11 Personal interview, Popular Committee soldier, Sana'a, Yemen, November 5, 2012.

12 Personal interview, National Security Bureau official, Sana'a, Yemen, December 17, 2012; personal interview, Popular Committee commander from Lawdar, Sana'a, Yemen, July 2, 2012; personal interview, humanitarian worker from Lahj Province, Sana'a, Yemen, January 15, 2013; personal interview, Yemeni journalist from Abyan, Sana'a, Yemen, February 7, 2013; personal interview, Yemeni scholar, Sana'a, Yemen, January 20, 2013. Locals in Abyan claimed that "youth" (low-level Popular Committee fighters) receive about 15,000 to 20,000 Yemeni rials (approximately \$70 to \$100) per month, plus food, water and *khat*, the leafy stimulant chewed by a majority of Yemeni men.

13 Personal interview, Abyani government official, Abyan Province, Yemen, July 2, 2012.

14 Personal interview, tribal shaykh from Abyan Province, Aden, Yemen, December 17, 2012.

15 Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Yemen, Tribal Militias in a Fierce Battle with al-Qaeda Wing," *Washington Post*, September 10, 2012.

16 Personal interview, journalist from Abyan, Sana'a, Yemen, February 7, 2013.

17 Personal interview, Yemeni scholar, Sana'a, Yemen, January 15, 2013.

18 Personal interview, Yemeni political analyst, Sana'a, Yemen, August 7, 2012.

19 Personal interview, tribal shaykh from Abyan, Aden, Yemen, December 17, 2012; "Commander of Popular Committees in Lawder: The Return of Fadhli to Zinjibar Will Cause Civil War Unless the Government Intervenes to Stop It," al-Masdar Online, November 5, 2012.

20 Personal interview, tribal shaykh from Abyan, Aden, Yemen, December 17, 2012.

21 "Commander of Popular Committees in Lawder."

22 "Boy Killed in Siraar Yafa'a by Popular Committees Gunfire," Barakish.net, November 2, 2012.

23 Personal interview, Yemeni journalist, Sana'a, Yemen, February 11, 2013.



## Conclusion

In the absence of a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in the country, the Yemeni state has raised local militias on numerous occasions to defend against external threats or to extend political influence into peripheral regions.<sup>24</sup> Saudi Arabia, which shares a 900-mile border with Yemen as well as the fallout from instability there, also has a long history of co-opting Yemeni tribes as a tool of statecraft.<sup>25</sup>

Yemen's "militiary"<sup>26</sup> strategy is not without risks. The Salih regime's co-optation of tribal militias during a string of wars from 2004 to 2010 against the Zaydi Shi'a Huthi movement in northern Sa'da Province led to the eclipsing of tribal revenge over mediation and arbitration as a means of conflict resolution.<sup>27</sup> In the absence of government oversight of the ad hoc forces, corruption has become endemic to the practice. Militia fighters in the Sa'da were reportedly accepted stipends from both sides of the conflict, while leaders embezzled large sums of government cash through the creation of "ghost soldiers."<sup>28</sup> In Yemen's

experience, the long-term consequence of arming and funding local militias to do the bidding of the state is that they amass enough power to challenge the state, as evidenced by frequent tribal road blockades and the persistent sabotage of electricity, oil and gas infrastructure since 2010.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the potential risks, President Hadi's best option is likely to continue funding and arming Abyan's militias until the volatile transition period concludes. Indeed, if he can manage to secure the loyalty of Abyan's Popular Committees through the transition, while ensuring that their anti-al-Qa'ida mission does not spill over into broader tribal conflicts and create new problems, Hadi could benefit greatly from political influence in the highly contested southern province. Yet incessant delays to the start of the National Dialogue Conference, along with steady calls for southern independence among Hiraak factions and fresh U.S.-Yemeni accusations of subversive Iranian-Huthi plots, have stalled the transition and cast further doubt on when conditions might improve.<sup>30</sup> According to a prominent political analyst in Aden, "These armed militias will engage in armed confrontations, and they might turn into a hard stick in the hands of any armed faction capable of funding them. The Popular Committees will turn into an internal problem for the government."<sup>31</sup>

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*Corruption Assessment* (Burlington, VT: USAID, 2006), p. 4.

29 Hasan al-Zaidi, "Interior Ministry Orders Lifting Tribal Road Blockade; Diesel Still Unavailable in Some Gas Stations," *Yemen Post*, July 21, 2008; Gabriel Koehler-Derrick ed., *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes, and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011), pp. 107-108.

30 "Yemen Requests Int'l Investigation in Iranian Arms Shipment," Yemen News Agency (SABA), February 8, 2013.

31 Personal interview, Aden-based political analyst, Sana'a, Yemen, January 14, 2013.

## Deciphering the Jihadist Presence in Syria: An Analysis of Martyrdom Notices

By Aaron Y. Zelin

WHEN THE SYRIAN uprising began in March 2011, the presence of jihadists in the protests was minimal at best. As the rebellion escalated, jihadists began to take advantage of the new landscape. Fighters associated with al-Qa'ida's worldview quietly entered the fight in the fall of 2011. These Salafi-jihadi fighters officially announced themselves in late January 2012 under the banner of Jabhat al-Nusra (the Support Front) and became one of the key fighting forces against the Bashar al-Assad regime by the fall of 2012.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Syrian protest movement turned into an armed insurrection in the summer of 2011, the jihad in Syria has become the *du jour* locale for fighters who want to topple the "apostate" al-Assad regime for a variety of strategic, geographic, and religious reasons. Similar to the Iraqi jihad at its zenith, users on al-Qa'ida's official and unofficial web forums began to post unofficial yet authentic martyrdom notices for individuals—both Syrian and foreign—who they perceived to have fought on behalf of the jihadist cause.<sup>2</sup>

This article looks quantitatively and qualitatively at these notices.<sup>3</sup> The data and biographical information collected is based on threads from jihadist web forums<sup>4</sup> dating from the

1 For more background, see Brian Fishman, "The Evidence of Jihadist Activity in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 5:5 (2012); Aaron Y. Zelin, "Jihadists in Syria Can be Found on the Internet," *al-Monitor*, October 18, 2012.

2 Although it is impossible to prove the authenticity of all of the martyrdom notices, the forums provide images and details on the deceased fighters, and it is unlikely that this information would be fabricated for so many individuals. Furthermore, the notices can be cross-referenced with videos posted on YouTube or on other Syrian opposition sites. In some cases, relatives of foreign fighters conducted honorary funerals even if they were buried in Syria.

3 There were limitations in collecting this dataset since some notices provided far richer information than others.

4 The data was drawn from al-Fida' al-Islamiya,

24 Sarah Phillips, "Developmental Dysfunction and Division in a Crisis State," *Developmental Leadership Program*, 2011, p. 17. "Popular" militias fought in the 1960s battles against a northern Zaydi Imamate and southern British colonial rule, which gave rise to the first Yemeni states. See Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 114-117.

25 Ellen Knickmeyer, "Trouble Down South: For Saudi Arabia, Yemen's Implosion is a Nightmare," *Foreign Policy*, July 5, 2011.

26 As explained in Martin van Vliet, "The Challenges of Retaking Northern Mali," *CTC Sentinel* 5:11-12 (2012), a "militiary" strategy is when a "state partly outsources its primary mandate of security provision to local militias. While often temporarily integrated into the military chain of command, these armed non-state actors mostly operate outside formal state structures."

27 See Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, "Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen - The Huthi Phenomenon," RAND Corporation, 2010, p. 259; "Defusing the Saada Time Bomb," International Crisis Group, May 27, 2009, pp. 14-16. A minister of parliament from Yafa' further claimed: "More than 20 soldiers from my own district have died since the beginning of the war. Neither army soldiers nor volunteers fighting alongside the army have received proper treatment. The families of those who were injured or killed did not receive any compensation and often were informed very late of what had happened. This inevitably created new tensions."

28 "Defusing the Saada Time Bomb." For more information on "ghost soldiers" in Yemen's military, see *Yemen*



start of the uprising through January 31, 2013. It is likely that some notices have been missed, but it is still useful to piece together each individual's identity, from where they are from, with whom they fought, and where they died.

It does not, however, include fighters mentioned in Jabhat al-Nusra's official statements or videos. Therefore, while the data is useful in providing clarity on the role of foreign fighters in Syria, it still suffers from many limitations and should be considered anecdotal.

#### Quantitative Data: Basic Metrics

There were discrepancies in the amount of data provided in each unofficial martyrdom notice. The quantitative data mainly focuses on city of origin, country of origin, city martyred in, and group joined. There are two levels of data compiled for these four metrics: overall, and in the past four months. Organizing the data by time period helps situate the current trajectories in the conflict.

In total, there are currently 130 individuals in the author's dataset, and 85 of the 130 have been identified in the past four months. The first recorded unofficial martyrdom notice was posted in February 2012, but this individual, the Kuwaiti Hussam al-Mutayri, actually died on August 29, 2011, fighting with the Free Syrian Army in Damascus.<sup>5</sup> Every individual in the dataset has a record of which country they were from. More than half (70 out of 130) mentioned the group with which the individual fought, while 76 of 130 locations of death were provided. Additionally, the city of origin of the martyrs was detailed 45 out of 130 times. The steep increase in individuals being reported as martyrs on the forums in the past four months, as seen in Table 1, provides circumstantial evidence that more foreign jihadists have joined the battlefield recently.<sup>6</sup>

Shumukh al-Islam, Ansar al-Mujahidin, and the al-Jihad al-'Alami forums, among other online global jihadist sources.

5 "Awal Shuhada' Jazirat al-'Arab fi Suriyya (Hussam al-Mutayri)," Shumukh al-Islam, February 17, 2012.

6 An alternative conclusion is that the rise in martyrdom notices is simply because more individuals are posting these statements than in the past. That said, because of

Country	# Overall	# in Past Four Months
Syria	45	30
Libya	14	10
Saudi Arabia	14	10
Egypt	13	8
Jordan	12	9
Tunisia	8	6
Palestine	6	5
Lebanon	6	3
Australia	2	1
Chechnya	2	1
Kuwait	2	0
UAE	1	1
Kosovo	1	1
Azerbaijan	1	0
France	1	0
Iraq	1	0
Spain	1	0

Table 1. Martyrdom notices by country of origin.

Table 1 highlights jihadist forum martyrdom notices from individuals' country of origin. Predictably, it shows Syrians as having the most records.<sup>7</sup> It also tentatively illustrates that similar to the Sinjar records captured by U.S. forces in Iraq, Libyans and Saudis have played important roles in the fight against the al-Assad regime.<sup>8</sup> Due to the proximity and known links between al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) and Jabhat al-Nusra, it is somewhat surprising that the number of Iraqis is so low. It is possible that Iraqis might be in more senior positions or facilitating activities along the border and therefore not on the front lines, but that is only speculation.

The data in Table 2, which shows the jihadist martyrdom notices for the city where the individual died fighting, confirms broader assumptions about in what cities jihadists are engaged. Large portions of cities in Table 2 are located in the northern and eastern regions of Syria where many of the Salafi-jihadi groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra or Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham are based.<sup>9</sup> It

the growth in the strength of groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra on the ground as well as backing by global jihadist ideologues, it is likely that there are more jihadists fighting today.

7 If one were to take into account official Jabhat al-Nusra releases, the number would be even higher.

8 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007).

9 Noman Benotman and Roisin Blake, "Jabhat al-Nusra: A Strategic Briefing," Quilliam Foundation, January 8, 2013; "Kurd-Jihadist Clashes in North Syria," Agence

also demonstrates the growing role some jihadists have played in recent battles with the regime, such as the takeover of the Taftanaz airbase.<sup>10</sup>

City	# Overall	# in Past Four Months
Aleppo	16	8
Idlib	9	5
Deir al-Zour	7	4
Dar'a	6	4
Taftanaz	5	5
Salqin	4	4
Damascus	3	1
al-Suwayda	2	2
Eastern Region	2	2
Saraqib	2	2
Zayzun	2	2
Homs	2	1
Salah al-Din	2	0
al-Qastal	1	1
Hama	1	1
Mo'adamiah	1	1
Sidon	1	1
Talkalakh	1	1
Ma'arrat al-Nu'man	1	1
Binsh	1	1
Anadan	1	0
Ariha	1	0
A'zaz	1	0
Bosra	1	0
Bab al-Hawa	1	0
Al-Sayyidah Zaynab	1	0

Table 2. Martyrdom notices by city of death.

Table 3 confirms what is likely uncontroversial: the majority of unofficial martyrdom notices belong to individuals affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra. Furthermore, it highlights the rapid increase in fighters who have joined its cause in recent months.<sup>11</sup> Table 3 also shows that jihadists in individual capacities have not recently joined and died while fighting with brigades attached to the Free Syrian Army. This could suggest that the recruiting networks for Jabhat al-Nusra within and outside of Syria have built greater capabilities. It could also be evidence that Jabhat al-Nusra has established itself to such an extent that foreign fighters refuse to fight with any other group.

France-Presse, January 18, 2013; Martin Chulov, "Syria Crisis: Al-Qaida Fighters Revealing Their True Colours, Rebels Say," *Guardian*, January 17, 2013; "Eastern Syrian Town Lives Under al Qaeda Rules," Reuters, January 30, 2013.

10 Andrew J. Tabler, Jeffrey White, and Aaron Y. Zelin, "Fallout from the Fall of Taftanaz," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 14, 2013.

11 For more details, see footnote 6.

Group	# Overall	# in Past Four Months
Jabhat al-Nusra	37	33
Free Syrian Army	8	0
Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham	6	4
Kata'ib al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad	2	2
Katibat al-Muhajirin	2	2
Liwa' al-Tawhid	2	1
Liwa' al-Ummah	2	1
Suqur al-Sham	1	1
al-Tali'ah al-Islamiyyah	1	1
Harakat al-Fajr al-Islamiyyah	1	1
Kata'ib al-Tawhid	1	1
Katibat al-Bara' bin Malik	1	1
Liwa' al-Furqan	1	1
Suqur Fatah al-Islam	1	1
Revolutionary Military Council in Hama	1	1
Katibat Muhammad	1	0
Liwa' `Amru bin al-`As	1	0
Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin Fi al-Sham	1	0

Table 3. Martyrdom notices by group affiliation.

There is also data for martyrdom notices by city of origin, but it is of a limited scope.<sup>12</sup> That said, similar to the Sinjar records, some cities such as Zarqa in Jordan and Derna in Libya were responsible for the most recruits. This could anecdotally suggest that some of the older facilitation networks during the time of the Iraq war are still operational or were reactivated in the past year. More information is needed to reach a definitive conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

12 The full list of individuals martyred by city of origin is as follows: Aleppo, Syria: 5; Zarqa, Jordan: 3; Derna, Libya: 3; Tripoli, Lebanon: 3; al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia: 2; Deir al-Zour, Syria: 2; Benghazi, Libya: 2; Tunis, Tunisia: 2; Damascus, Syria: 2; Gaza, Palestine: 2; Alexandria, Egypt: 1; Ariana, Tunisia: 1; Ayn Shams, Egypt: 1; Binsh, Syria: 1; Dhiban, Syria: 1; Ha'il, Saudi Arabia: 1; Irbid, Jordan: 1; Ma'an, Jordan: 1; Melbourne, Australia: 1; Pristina, Kosovo: 1; Mahdia, Tunisia: 1; Arar, Saudi Arabia: 1; Ceuta, Spain: 1; Fayyum, Egypt: 1; Homs, Syria: 1; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: 1; Damietta, Egypt: 1; Kufr al-Shaykh, Egypt: 1; Upper Egypt, Egypt: 1. The number of individuals martyred in the past four months by city of origin is as follows: Aleppo, Syria: 1; Zarqa, Jordan: 3; Derna, Libya: 2; Tripoli, Lebanon: 2; al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia: 2; Deir al-Zour, Syria: 2; Benghazi, Libya: 1; Tunis, Tunisia: 1; Damascus, Syria: 1; Gaza, Palestine: 1; Alexandria, Egypt: 1; Ariana, Tunisia: 1; Ayn Shams, Egypt: 1; Binsh, Syria: 1; Dhiban, Syria: 1; Ha'il, Saudi Arabia: 1; Irbid, Jordan: 1; Ma'an, Jordan: 1; Melbourne, Australia: 1; Pristina, Kosovo: 1; Mahdia, Tunisia: 1; Arar, Saudi Arabia: 0; Ceuta, Spain: 0; Fayyum, Egypt: 0; Homs, Syria: 0; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: 0; Damietta, Egypt: 0; Kufr al-Shaykh, Egypt: 0; Upper Egypt, Egypt: 0.

13 Ibid.

The records yielded a number of other details. Of the 130 individuals in the dataset, 10 noted that they previously spent time in prison. A different grouping of 14 showed that they had experience fighting in other conflicts, three of which stated they had fought in two prior jihads. Seven of the 14 individuals fought during the Libyan uprising against the Mu`ammar Qadhafi regime, three during the Iraq war, two in Yemen, two against Israel, and one each in Afghanistan, the Sinai, Chechnya, and Kosovo. This suggests that the fight in Libya provided a starting point for Libyans, Egyptians, and Palestinians to fight in Syria. This is not surprising when taking into account that there are known training camps in Libya that provide skills to fighters before they depart for jihad in Syria.<sup>14</sup>

#### Qualitative Data: Martyrs' Stories

There were two themes among the martyrs' biographies where details on the individual's life were provided: involvement with jihadist activism online, and those who became commanders or religious officials in different rebel groups. Additionally, there were other distinctive stories from the martyrs.

#### Online Jihadists

Over the years, self-described "jihadists" have moved from non-violent online activism to play a direct role in fighting on behalf of al-Qa`ida-affiliated Salafi-jihadi groups. The Syrian war is no different. Seven of the biographies in the dataset included details on the individual's online activism.

For example, Muhammad Abu Yasin, a Syrian from Idlib who died in late June 2012, helped with the production and dissemination of online magazines. He went by the names of `Awaf al-Qa`ida and Jundi Dawlat al-Islam.<sup>15</sup>

14 "Libya's Terrorist Training Camps," CNN, January 19, 2013; Aaron Y. Zelin, "Jihadism's Foothold in Libya," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 12, 2012.

15 "Al-Shahid bi-Idhin Allah Muhammad Abu Yasin Jundi al-Dawla Ahad A`dha' al-Muntada," Shumukh al-Islam, July 20, 2012.

Similarly, Muhammad al-Shajrawi, a Syrian who died in mid-July 2012, and Muhib Ru'yat al-Rahman (whose real name is Jamal al-Yafi), a Lebanese foreign fighter from Tripoli who died in December 2012, were both members and contributors to al-Qa`ida's forums al-Fida' al-Islamiya and Shumukh al-Islam. Al-Yafi was prolific, posting 26,761 times on Shumukh alone.<sup>16</sup>

#### Commanders and Religious Officials

In addition to individuals joining the fight who previously had online careers, some individuals had risen to levels of power either militarily or religiously within rebel groups. For example, Abu `Abad (also known as Abu Mujahid), a Syrian from Aleppo who was affiliated with Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham, a Salafi-jihadi fighting force, was a supervisor for the Shari'a court established in Aleppo.<sup>17</sup> He died in mid-September 2012.<sup>18</sup> Labib Sulayman (also known as Abu Hamza), another Syrian

**"The trend of affiliation points to Syrians and foreigners who have a worldview closely aligned with al-Qa`ida and who join the Salafi-jihadi rebel group Jabhat al-Nusra."**

member of Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham, who died in mid-October 2012, was according to a Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham official one of the first defectors from the Syrian military from Hama.<sup>19</sup> He previously had been in the al-Assad regime's military academy.<sup>20</sup> He became a commander for a Kata'ib

16 "Sur `Ars al-Shahid bi-Idhin Allah Ikhwaum -- Muhib bin Ladin ... al-Nasir Tawala -- mata Sanlahiq bi-l-Qafilah," Shumukh al-Islam, July 20, 2012; "Li-l-Tawdhih -- Istishhad al-Shaykh -- Muhib Ru'yat al-Rahman," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, December 18, 2012.

17 "Istishhad al-Shaykh al-Zahid al-Mujahid wa al-Mulaqab bi-Abu `Abid al-Mushrif `ala al-Mahkamah al-Shar`iyah fi Halab," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, September 18, 2012.

18 Ibid.

19 "Istishhad al-Qa'id al-`Askari li-Katibat Salah ad-Din -- Abu Hamzah -- Kata'ib Ahrar ash-Sham," Shumukh al-Islam, October 11, 2012.

20 Ibid.

Ahrar al-Sham's sub-unit, Katibat Salah al-Din.<sup>21</sup>

There are also individuals who had prior religious training, such as the Syrian from Deir al-Zour, Shaykh Isma'il Muhammad al-'Alush (also known as Abu Ayman), who was affiliated with Liwa' al-Furqan and died in late December 2012, as well as the Jordanian Riyad Hadayb (also known as Abu 'Umar al-Faruq), who was a member of Jabhat al-Nusra. Al-'Alush purportedly had a master's degree in Shari'a, while Hadayb was an imam before he went to Syria.<sup>22</sup> Hadayb became a mufti for Jabhat al-Nusra before his death on January 23, 2013.<sup>23</sup>

These examples show that jihadists, both Syrian and foreign, are becoming part of the budding civilian societal structure related to the establishment of Shari'a courts in Syria. These courts have helped provide a small semblance of relative law and order in some pockets of the country that have been liberated or partially controlled by rebel forces.

#### Unique Backgrounds

Others in the dataset have stories that are not threaded together by any particular theme. One individual, Ahmad Raf'at (also known as Abu Bara'), an Egyptian from Kufr al-Shaykh who died fighting with Jabhat al-Nusra, had previously been imprisoned in Egypt.<sup>24</sup> He was released after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, and he swiftly went across the border to join the fight in Libya against the regime until Qadhafi's death.<sup>25</sup> Raf'at then traveled to Syria where he died in early July 2012.<sup>26</sup>

There were also cases when Syrians who were outside of the country returned to fight. Hussam al-Din al-Armanazi (also known as Abu 'Umar Hussam al-Din

al-Halabi), originally from Aleppo, had been studying medicine in Germany at the outbreak of the uprising.<sup>27</sup> Al-Armanazi made it back to Saadallah al-Jabri Square in Aleppo for the protests on March 15, 2011, and was arrested the next day.<sup>28</sup> He spent two months in prison, and after his release he returned to Germany and helped with online activities for local committees in Aleppo.<sup>29</sup> He later returned to Syria to fight in Idlib and Aleppo, and he died in late July 2012.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, the 15-year-old 'Umar Bakirati (also known as Abu Hamza al-Faruq), from Qudsaya, fled Syria to Turkey with his family.<sup>31</sup> He returned and became a sniper for Jabhat al-Nusra, allegedly killing 13 pro-government *shabiha* before he died in Hama in late October 2012.<sup>32</sup> Both stories illustrate the duty felt by Syrians in the face of the al-Assad regime's crackdown.

There are also those who had decades of experience in the overall jihadist movement. For instance, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jughayman, a Saudi from al-Ahsa and former professor at King Faisal University, had been involved with some of the major fields of jihad dating back to the 1980s. According to the forums, al-Jughayman fought in Afghanistan on two different tours, as well as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kashmir, and Iraq. The al-Assad regime, however, apprehended and then imprisoned him for three years in the middle of the last decade. He died fighting against that same regime in late November 2012.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, there were individuals who followed in the footsteps of family members who had previous experiences fighting jihad. For instance, Muhammad Yasin Jarad, a Jordanian from Zarqa who died fighting with Jabhat al-Nusra in al-Suwayda in mid-January 2013,

was cousins with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the former leader of AQI.<sup>34</sup> Even closer-linked, Jarad's father Yasin was purportedly behind the Najaf operation that killed Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, one of Iraq's most prominent Shi'a Muslim leaders, in 2003.<sup>35</sup> This highlights the familial connections that have inspired others to take up the cause as well.

#### Conclusion

With the Syrian war continuing into the spring with no end in sight, it is likely that more unofficial martyrdom stories from the jihadist forums will continue to trickle out about fighters who died waging war against the al-Assad regime. The trend of affiliation points to Syrians and foreigners who have a worldview closely aligned with al-Qa'ida and who join the Salafi-jihadi rebel group Jabhat al-Nusra.

Moreover, foreigners joining the fight will likely continue to come from Libya, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Tunisia based on current trends, proximity, and capable facilitation networks. As more data becomes available, an even clearer picture will emerge to better understand who is fighting in the conflict as part of the jihadist faction within the broader rebel movement.

*Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He also maintains the website Jihadology.net, which is a primary source archive for global jihadist materials.*

21 Ibid.

22 "Istishhadal-Shaykh Isma'il Muhammad al-'Alush," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, December 28, 2012; "Abu 'Umar al-Faruq al-Mufti al-Shar'i li-Jabhat al-Nusra Tabat Hayan wa maytan," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, January 23, 2013.

23 Ibid.

24 "Bushra Istishhadal-Akh Ahmad Rif'at 'ala Ardh Suriyya fi Muwajahat al-Taghut al-Nusayri," al-Jihad al-'Alami, July 11, 2012.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 "Al-Shahid bi-Idhin Allah Hussam al-Din min Halab Taraka al-Tib fi Almaniyya wa-nal al-Shahada fi al-Sham-Sura," al-Sanam Islamic Network, July 31, 2012.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 "Al-Shahid Abu Hamzah al-Faruq ma' Inshudah la tas'aluni 'an Hayyati," Shabakat Ansar al-Sham, October 31, 2012.

32 Ibid.

33 "Sur # Istishhad al-Batal 'Abd al-'Aziz," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, November 24, 2012.

34 "Istishhad Suhur Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi fi Midinah al-Suwayda' Janub Suriyya wa-l-Urdun Tarfadh Isdar Shahdah Himam al-Bilawi," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, January 18, 2013.

35 Ibid.



## British Fighters Joining the War in Syria

By Raffaello Pantucci

SINCE THE START of the Syrian war, British police have arrested and charged three men for their roles in a terrorist conspiracy linked to the conflict. British security officials fear that these arrests may only be the tip of an iceberg as they watch Syria become the brightest flame drawing in young British radicals. As British Foreign Secretary William Hague recently said, "Syria is now the number one destination for jihadists anywhere in the world today. This includes a number of individuals connected with the United Kingdom and other European countries. They may not pose a threat to us when they first go to Syria, but if they survive some may return ideologically hardened and with experience of weapons and explosives."<sup>1</sup>

The most striking aspect about the Syria-UK connection is its similarity to past events. Not only are there shades of Bosnia in the ease with which Britons can join the war in Syria,<sup>2</sup> but there are also similarities in the structures that have nurtured the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Longstanding London-based preachers have returned to join fighters on the frontlines, convoys run by Muslim charities take food and supplies while hosting events at which they criticize the lack of action by the international community, and young men are taking time off from their ordinary lives to join the fight. Atop all of this, a political debate in the United Kingdom—reflective of the broader global debate—about what action to take in Syria has failed to deliver meaningful results, providing more fodder for those

who perceive that the West is turning a blind eye to the plight of Muslims.

In highlighting the complexity of this threat, this article identifies the current known links between the Syrian and British jihadist communities, as well as the broader context from which it is emerging. It also shows how fallout from Syria has the potential to have negative repercussions in the United Kingdom for years to come.

### The Case of the Kidnapped Journalists

Attention was first drawn publicly to the issue of British jihadists operating in Syria when a British and Dutch journalist escaped from their captors in Syria and made it to safety in Turkey. The men, Jerome Oerlemans and John Cantlie, had entered Syria on July 19, 2012, on assignment, but had the misfortune to fall into the hands of a group of mostly foreign extremists.<sup>4</sup> Held captive for a week, the men were repeatedly threatened with death and beaten after an escape attempt.<sup>5</sup> They were eventually released by a group of Syrians who had initially helped them enter the country.<sup>6</sup> Yet the most surprising news to emerge from the event was that among the men's captors had been almost a dozen British jihadists—nine of whom "had London accents" and at least one who claimed to be a National Health Service (NHS) doctor.<sup>7</sup>

The trainee doctor in question, Shajul Islam, was intercepted on October 9, 2012, when he returned on a flight from Egypt with his wife and child.<sup>8</sup> A Briton of Bangladeshi origin, little is known about Shajul Islam aside from his age, 26-years-old, that he is from Stratford in East London, and that he is a doctor.<sup>9</sup> A graduate of St. Bartholomew's and a University of London hospital, he reportedly had a first class degree in

biochemistry.<sup>10</sup> According to captive John Cantlie, he carried an NHS medical kit with him and planned to return to work as a trauma consultant after a two year sabbatical.<sup>11</sup> Less is known about his co-conspirator Jubayer Chowdhury, except that he is of Bangladeshi descent. Both are currently awaiting trial for their role in kidnapping the two journalists.

In what was reported as an expansion of the case, authorities arrested an additional six men in mid-January 2013 as part of a wide-ranging police investigation into links with Syria.<sup>12</sup> Authorities arrested one group of three men at addresses in east London, while a fourth man identified as being Portuguese was picked up at Gatwick airport.<sup>13</sup> All were detained "on suspicion of commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism."<sup>14</sup> Authorities arrested a second pair "outside a business" in west London, although no link was immediately drawn between the two cases.<sup>15</sup> In the end, all but Mohamed Elyasse Taleouine from Lisson Grove, north London, were cleared, while Taleouine was charged with possession of a blank-firing MAC-10 that had been converted into a live weapon.<sup>16</sup> A week later, police went back and re-arrested a man from the first set of arrests, revealing him to be Najul Islam, brother of Shajul Islam.<sup>17</sup>

Najul Islam was charged with a variety of offenses, including funding his brother's travel to Syria, funding Jubayer Chowdhury's return from Syria, and sending them money to support their activities.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, police believe he traveled by vehicle from the United Kingdom through Turkey to Syria to

1 William Hague, "Foreign Secretary on Countering Terrorism," speech at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), February 14, 2013.

2 Bosnia was a bus or car ride away for British citizens, similar to Syria.

3 Covered in greater detail later in the article, there are charitable organizations, as well as jihadist support networks, that help British Muslims become involved in Syria: either in providing aid as part of charity convoys, or more active roles as fighters. This is similar to Bosnia where similar structures existed. Evan Kohlmann's *Al-Qaeda's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* provides a snapshot of British jihadist support structures in Bosnia.

4 John Cantlie, "Are You Ready to Die?" *Sunday Times*, August 5, 2012.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 John-Paul Ford Rojas, "NHS Doctor 'Led Extremist Cell in Syria,'" *Telegraph*, August 27, 2012.

8 "British Police Arrest 2 at Heathrow Airport in Probe into Terrorist Activity in Syria," Associated Press, October 9, 2012.

9 Tom Whitehead, "NHS Doctor Accused of Being Part of a British Jihadi Group in Syria," *Telegraph*, October 17, 2012.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Paul Peachey, "Four Men Arrested Over Syria Terror Fears," *Independent*, January 10, 2012.

13 Tom Whitehead, "Four Men Arrested Under Terror Laws After Kidnap of Journalist," *Telegraph*, January 10, 2012.

14 Ibid.

15 Margaret Davis, "London Man Charged Over Sub-Machine Gun Possession," *Independent*, January 17, 2013.

16 "Man, 20, is Held on Sub-Machine Gun Charge by Officers Investigating Alleged Support for Terrorism," *West End Extra*, January 18, 2013.

17 "Man Charged in UK Over Journalists' Syria Kidnap," *Agence France-Presse*, January 25, 2013.

18 "Man at Court Charged with Terrorism Act 2006 Offence," *Crime & Justice*, January 25, 2013.

provide equipment including night vision goggles, air rifle optic mounts, and medical supplies.<sup>19</sup> Likely to come to trial next year, more information will then be released about the men and how they reached Syria.

A great deal more information, however, has emerged about an unconnected, separate case involving Nassim Terreri and Walid Blidi, two men of Algerian descent who were raised in London and died March 26, 2012, at Darkoush, a few miles from the Turkish border.<sup>20</sup> Respectively from west and south London, the men led relatively uneventful lives prior to their deaths.<sup>21</sup> Reported as a kind young man who worked hard at school, Nassim Terreri dropped out of a university course and had drifted into waiting tables.<sup>22</sup> In his early 20s, he found religion and traveled to Mecca, after which he began wearing traditional Arab dress.<sup>23</sup> He reportedly participated in an aid convoy to Gaza led by Minister of Parliament George Galloway.<sup>24</sup> By the end of 2011, however, his family noted he had shaved off his beard and met a girl—suggesting that his religious fervor may have passed.<sup>25</sup> In early 2012, he went on a vacation with Walid Blidi to France.<sup>26</sup> Two weeks later, he called his mother from the Syrian border and, according to a family friend, “told her he was going to find out what was really happening in Syria.”<sup>27</sup> After another two weeks, she received a call that he and Blidi were dead.<sup>28</sup> Much less is known about Blidi, except that in August 2007 he was arrested in Exeter alongside a pair of others during a police drug sting.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, reports from Syria indicated that Blidi and Terreri were journalists.<sup>30</sup> Little evidence, however, emerged of them having done any reporting, and the al-Assad regime included their names in a list to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon as evidence foreign terrorists were involved in the insurgency.<sup>31</sup> The real story emerged when reporters interviewed fighters who claimed to have been with the men on the night they died.<sup>32</sup> The two British fighters apparently opened fire at a passing Syrian government convoy, attracting retaliatory fire and getting the group caught in a firefight between government and rebel forces.<sup>33</sup> During the clash, other Syrian fighters were killed, and another Briton known only as Hamza was injured.<sup>34</sup> His fate is unknown.<sup>35</sup> The brigade in which the men were fighting, the Hisham Haboub brigade of the Free Syrian Army, was not Salafi-jihadi, but the men’s actions and deaths highlight how easy it is for British nationals to participate in frontline fighting in Syria. Biographies published in the British media highlighted that Nassim Terreri in particular “favorited” videos of “extremist Australian preacher” Shaykh Feiz Mohammed.<sup>36</sup>

#### “Londonistan’s” Syrian Flavor

Young Britons fighting in Syria is not a surprising development. British fighters have been found on almost every jihadist battlefield since Afghanistan in the 1970s. This pipeline was nurtured by the unique combination of restive second-generation immigrant communities, dissident Arab populations—both secular and non-secular—who used bases in London to promote causes, including anti-government agendas, at home, with a seemingly passive British government response.<sup>37</sup> Captured in the public imagination with the shorthand term “Londonistan,” this community also provided a home for radical preachers who brought jihadist

ideas to British shores and ended up radicalizing a portion of British youth. This led to young Britons becoming involved in international radical networks, including al-Qa`ida, leading ultimately to the July 7, 2005, bombings when a group of young Britons under orders from al-Qa`ida killed 52 people on London’s transport system.<sup>38</sup>

Since the advent of the Arab Spring, however, the larger connection between Arab dissidents based in London and their home nations has become more prominent. Libyan exiles from London and Manchester went back in unknown numbers to fight alongside the rebels against the Mu`ammar Qadhafi regime,<sup>39</sup> a number of key Tunisian Ennahda party members (including leader Rashid al-Ghannouchi<sup>40</sup>) relocated from Britain to help run the country in the wake of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s departure, and prominent former Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Kamal Helbawy was among a number of exiles who returned to Egypt as Hosni Mubarak was deposed.<sup>41</sup> The United Kingdom has a personal connection with the anti-government forces in many Arab Spring countries—whether they are secular, nationalist, or Islamist. This connection is also present with Syria, where dissidents and exiles from the Syrian community living in the United Kingdom (estimated at 13,000 strong<sup>42</sup>) have become a key support network for their brethren

19 Ibid.

20 Tom Coghlan and Laura Pitel, “The British Pals Who Died Waging Holy War in Syria,” *Times*, October 13, 2012.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 “Drug Squad Criticizes Jail Terms Handed out to Crack Cocaine Trio,” *Express and Echo*, February 10, 2008.

30 “Two Independent Journalists Killed in Syria,” Committee to Protect Journalists, March 27, 2012.

31 Laura Pitel and James Hider, “British ‘Terrorists’ Among Dead, Says Syria,” *Times*, May 18, 2012.

32 Coghlan and Pitel.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 “Two Independent Journalists Killed in Syria.”

36 Coghlan and Pitel.

37 Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad: My Life with al Qaeda* (London: Hurst, 2006), p. 16.

38 Raffaello Pantucci, “A Biography of Rashid Rauf: Al-Qa`ida’s British Operative,” *CTC Sentinel* 5:7 (2012); Nic Robertson, Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, “Documents Give New Details on al Qaeda’s London Bombings,” CNN, April 30, 2012.

39 Exact numbers are unknown, but anecdotal stories suggest that dozens went back to fight from Manchester’s Libyan community. See Jane Deith, “The Teenage Libyan Rebel from Manchester,” Channel 4 News, June 11, 2011; Edna Fernandes, “Why Do So Many Libyan Rebels Seen on TV Speak with British Accents?” *Daily Mail*, July 31, 2011.

40 “Tunisian Islamist Leader Rashid Ghannouchi Returns Home,” BBC, January 30, 2011. Another key figure to have returned was Said Ferjani.

41 Mohamed Elmesad, “Profile: Kamal al-Helbawy, a Defector of Conscience,” *Egypt Independent*, September 4, 2012. For a longer overview of Britain’s “Londonistan” community and the impact of the Arab Spring, see James Brandon and Raffaello Pantucci, “UK Islamists and the Arab Uprisings,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 13 (2012).

42 Zubeda Malik, “Britain’s ‘Fragmented’ Syrian Community,” BBC, August 24, 2012.

in the Middle East. Support includes providing funding and aid convoys, dissident groups providing a way for information to get out from the war raging in Syria, as well as fighters and spiritual leaders for the rebellion.

In addition to Syrians, British Muslims of other ethnicities have traveled to Syria as well. As highlighted by the previous examples, British fighters known to have fought in Syria are young men who have graduated from university, worked as waiters, trainee doctors, or even as former drug dealers. The exact numbers in terms of ethnic provenance are hard to determine, but a substantial amount seem to be drawn from communities other than Syrian. According to Birmingham Minister of Parliament Khalid Mahmood, as of August 2012 at least 30 young Britons not of Syrian descent had traveled to Syria.<sup>43</sup> A Sudanese community leader from west London reported that he had spoken to a younger member of his community who claimed to have at least 21 friends who were training to go to Syria, and spoke of joining formerly UK-based Moroccans and Somalis who had already gone to fight.<sup>44</sup> In August 2012, a British journalist in Aleppo met a British convert from Walthamstow who used the name "Abu Yacoub."<sup>45</sup> He claimed to have converted five years earlier, having originally been born in Tanzania and brought to the United Kingdom as a child.<sup>46</sup> He came to Syria four months earlier and was found in the company of an Iraqi friend who had been injured. Both men claimed to be members of Kata'ib Ahrar al-Sham (Free Men of Syria), an Islamist group involved in the war.<sup>47</sup>

Another report from later in the year instead highlighted a "pious" young Bangladeshi Briton who had risen in the ranks of foreign fighters and was responsible for about 50 Britons who went to fight in Syria.<sup>48</sup> Thus far, none

of those reportedly arrested around the case linked to the kidnapping of the two journalists have been identified as being of Syrian descent.

Yet while the foot soldiers may come from different ethnicities, the older "Londonistani" warriors who have gone back to join the frontlines seem to be Syrian. Most prominent is Abu Basir al-Tartusi, a preacher formerly based in Poplar, east London. One of the few preachers with a following among radical communities to still operate in the United Kingdom, al-Tartusi was once quoted in the press as being "a leading jihadi theologian on a level with Abu Qatada."<sup>49</sup>

His importance internationally had not translated into great acclaim among Britain's young jihadist community. His lack of English and the fact that he condemned suicide bombing (including the July 7, 2005, London bombings), taking a more moderate line than most of the "Londonistani" preachers, meant he had less of a following among the radical community in the United Kingdom. The radical community tended to follow preachers such as Abu Hamza al-Masri<sup>50</sup> and Abdullah Faisal<sup>51</sup> (both of whom were incarcerated on charges of inciting racial hatred and murder), Abu Qatada (who openly boasted to British authorities about his power over the United Kingdom's extremist Algerian community),<sup>52</sup> and Omar Bakri Mohammed (the Syrian preacher who founded al-Muhajiroun).<sup>53</sup> Al-Tartusi's decision to travel to the Syrian frontlines surprised some, and likely elevated him in the eyes of the broader radical community.<sup>54</sup> While

al-Tartusi's exact activities since traveling to the front are unclear, he has maintained a steady production of materials and *fatawa* and has been spotted at least twice brandishing an AK-47.<sup>55</sup> Al-Tartusi responded angrily when the news emerged that he was at the front, with the implication being that he was consorting with terrorists, and he published a remonstrance on his site in which he declared that he was there as "a servant and an adviser to all the heroic rebels and to all the Syrian people who are in defiance against the oppression and tyranny of Bashar al-Assad."<sup>56</sup>

Another former "Londonistani" who appeared briefly toward the beginning of the Syrian conflict and then disappeared was Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, otherwise known as Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. A prominent jihadist theologian, U.S. and Pakistani forces captured him in Quetta in 2005 and eventually transferred him to Syrian authorities.<sup>57</sup> In the late 1990s, al-Suri was one of the prominent former Arab Afghan warriors to have landed in London as Afghanistan descended into civil war and the jihad against the Soviets concluded.<sup>58</sup> Alongside Abu Qatada, al-Suri managed the jihadist screed *Ansar* that openly supported extremist groups in Algeria. Following his time in London, he moved to Afghanistan from where he helped train fighters and authored literature until he was captured in late 2005.<sup>59</sup>

Al-Suri languished in Syrian custody until early February 2012, when news emerged on the Shumukh jihadist website that he had been freed.<sup>60</sup> While it is hard to independently verify this

"British Jihadi Recruits 50 Muslims for War in Syria," *Times*, October 18, 2012.

49 Duncan Gardham, "The Poplar Preacher Leading an Armed Gang of Jihadis in Syria," *Telegraph*, October 19, 2012.

50 "Abu Hamza Jailed for Seven Years," BBC, February 7, 2006.

51 "Hate Preaching Cleric Jailed," BBC, March 7, 2003.

52 Omar Mahmoud Mohammed Othman, or Abu Qatada v. Secretary of State for the Home Department, Special Immigration Appeals Commission, March 8, 2004.

53 Mahan Abedin, "Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed," *Spotlight on Terror* 2:5 (2005); Shiv Malik, "The Missing Links," *New Statesman*, May 7, 2007.

54 This statement is drawn from conversations with London's Muslim community, and discussions such as

the following on the Islamic Awakening Forum: [www.forums.islamicawakening.com/fl8/sheikh-abu-basir-al-tartousi-hafidhahullah-liberates-61936](http://www.forums.islamicawakening.com/fl8/sheikh-abu-basir-al-tartousi-hafidhahullah-liberates-61936).

55 Ibid. Also see the video at [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=uJfBkUgkSU8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=uJfBkUgkSU8).

56 For details, see his statement at [www.abubaseer.biz-land.com/hadath/Read/hadath%2093.pdf](http://www.abubaseer.biz-land.com/hadath/Read/hadath%2093.pdf). By February 2013, al-Tartusi had returned to the United Kingdom.

57 This abbreviated biography is drawn primarily from Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (London: Hurst, 2009).

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Syria's Surprising Release of Jihadi Strategist Abu Musab al Suri," *Terrorism Monitor* 10:3 (2012).

43 Andrew Gilligan, "Security Services 'Failing' to Stop British Jihadis Heading to Syria," *Sunday Telegraph*, August 25, 2012.

44 Ibid.

45 Richard Spencer, "British Convert to Islam Vows to Fight to the Death on Syrian Rebel Front Line," *Telegraph*, August 16, 2012.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 David Brown, Sean O'Neill and Dominic Kennedy,



claim, the news has been widely accepted as true among the expert community and seemingly confirmed both by reliable extremists on forums and London-based extremists who knew him.<sup>61</sup> The logic behind the al-Assad regime's decision to release him is unclear.

### Humanitarian Support

Support for the war in Syria has not only come through fighters and warrior preachers. One of the more under-reported but highly important figures to have emerged from the United Kingdom is Muhammad Surur bin Nayif Zain al-Abidin. A British passport holder, Surur was based in the United Kingdom for almost two decades after moving there in the 1980s.<sup>62</sup> He has reportedly been characterized as a "Godfather-like" figure who had previously vetted individuals who had traveled to the United Kingdom to meet with Saad al-Faqih or Muhammad al-Massari. Al-Faqih and al-Massari are two prominent Saudi dissidents in London who have played senior roles in the "Londonistan" community. As well as individually running dissident groups aimed against the Saudi regime, al-Massari in particular was an active supporter of Britain's nascent online jihadist community.<sup>63</sup>

A former Muslim Brotherhood activist, Surur was an innovator in Salafist thinking and established with his followers the Center for Islamic Studies in Birmingham, from where he published magazines and later ran

the [www.alsunnah.org](http://www.alsunnah.org) website.<sup>64</sup> In 2004, Surur left the United Kingdom, moving to Jordan and later to Qatar, and it is from here that, according to one prominent Syrian journalist based in London, he has become an important figure in the flow of Qatari money to Syria.<sup>65</sup> As journalist Malik al-Abdeh alleged, "Surur has established himself as one of the key conduits for Qatari money to the anti-Assad rebels."<sup>66</sup>

Other Syrians have remained in the United Kingdom and have taken roles publicly supporting the rebels in other ways, either through formal new Syrian National Council structures or Syrian-managed NGOs.<sup>67</sup> Beyond politics, a basic sense of feeling the need to support the Syrian refugees seen regularly on television screens has driven unknown numbers of Britons to give money and other forms of aid to support those living in refugee camps in Turkey or elsewhere. Support for Syrian refugees has come from traditional charitable entities from across Britain's Muslim community. Using a blend of videos, magazines, flyers, stalls in city centers, charity boxes inside and outside mosques, and sponsored events, these charities turn the money they raise into goods which they then drive—in convoys usually with donated ambulances—to refugee camps in Turkey.<sup>68</sup> There is no evidence that these are anything but charitable enterprises, but some of the individuals involved are notable for more radical views.<sup>69</sup> More openly controversial

groups such as Hizb al-Tahrir have also regularly held demonstrations or protest events at which they call for al-Assad's downfall.<sup>70</sup> At these events, emotive language is used to encourage people to help support the refugees, with preachers often providing a religious explanation for why more should be done. These are all legitimate activities, yet it highlights the backdrop around which the issue is discussed in Britain's Muslim community.

Demonstrating the ease with which British citizens are able to get close to the fighting—either for military or humanitarian purposes—former Guantanamo Bay prisoner and spokesman for the activist group Cage Prisoners, Moazzam Begg, made a trip to Syria as part of an aid convoy at some point in the first half of 2012. According to his own report, he traveled to "the outskirts of the city of Aleppo [where] I stayed with a group of pious, well-educated, relatively young and very hospitable fighters."<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

The trouble in Syria remains beyond British borders. Security officials are somewhat constrained about how to respond, and understandably only take action when specific cases linked to kidnapping or terrorism can be constructed. The question becomes what will happen to the young men who are bloodied in the conflict after the Syrian war winds down, as well as the networks that will have been established between radical groups in Syria and in the United Kingdom.

It took a few years before former Bosnian fighters were implicated in terrorist plots in the United Kingdom. In 1995, Andrew Rowe, an aimless former drug dealer, converted to Islam and went to Bosnia where he took up arms and was

61 Specifically, Egyptian Yasser al-Siri has claimed that he has information pertaining to Abu Mus'ab's release. See "Abu Musab Al-Suri Speaks on His Pakistan Detention," *The Arab Digest*, February 24, 2012.

62 Details on Surur can be found in Lia.

63 In 1999, a British man working for Railtrack, Mohammed Sohail, was revealed to be using his work account to fundraise for jihad abroad, in locations such as Kashmir, Algeria and Chechnya, among others. When confronted by reporters, he told them, "I work for two people really, Mr. Massari and Osama bin Laden." See Chris Hastings and Jessica Berry, "Muslim Militia Training in Britain: Bin Laden Groups to Join Mujahedeen for Various Wars, Including Chechnya," *Ottawa Citizen*, November 7, 1999. In later years, al-Massari would openly talk on the BBC about running jihad supporting websites and radio stations from the United Kingdom. See "The New al-Qaeda: jihad.com," BBC, July 20, 2005; Philip Johnston, "Calls to Deport 'the Voice of al-Qa'eda,'" *Telegraph*, July 27, 2005.

64 Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 38; Lia.

65 Ibid.; personal interview, Malik al-Abdeh, London, November 2012.

66 Ibid.

67 Two prominent examples are Walid Saffour and Rami Abdulrahman.

68 The author encountered one such convoy on its way to Ancona, Italy, in the Marche region of Italy heading to a boat to Turkey. With a bus branded from "Dudley [a British city in the west midlands] to Damascus," the drivers reported being part of a six vehicle convoy including an ambulance and a heavy goods truck with clothes and children's milk. They were linked to the charity United Muslims ([www.unitedmuslims.co.uk](http://www.unitedmuslims.co.uk)). Other convoys have been sent from the Aid Convoy charity ([www.aidconvoy.org.uk](http://www.aidconvoy.org.uk)).

69 For example, on February 25, 2012, outside the Syrian Embassy, the group Aid Convoy 2 Syria (that later became the Aid Convoy) held an event called "Answer the Call: Charity Rally for Syria," at which Shaykh Haithem al-Haddad and Imam Shakeel Begg spoke with

the Qur'anic recitation provided by Sufyan Mustafa Kamal, the son of recently deported preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri. While none of these men have been convicted on any terrorism charges or fallen under suspicion of any crime, they have all attracted some controversy due to the tone in their preaching.

70 For pictures of this demonstration, see [www.demotix.com/news/1060472/hizb-ut-tahrir-march-through-london-support-syrian-uprising#media-1060346](http://www.demotix.com/news/1060472/hizb-ut-tahrir-march-through-london-support-syrian-uprising#media-1060346).

71 Moazzam Begg, "Syria: My Journey to the Land of Blessing, and Torture," *Cage Prisoners*, August 16, 2012.

injured during fighting.<sup>72</sup> In 2003, he was arrested with unspecified terrorist plans after being connected with a number of French former Bosnian fighters who carried out a series of violent robberies across France.<sup>73</sup> Saajid Badat went to Sarajevo in 1998 and the next year to Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup> Two years later he was on his way back to the United Kingdom with Richard Reid and a set of “shoe bombs” with the intent to blow up transatlantic airlines.<sup>75</sup> Also in 1998, Omar Sharif answered the call to go and join Kosovar militants fighting Serbs, although he cut his trip short. He went to Damascus approximately a year later, then Afghanistan after 9/11, before his fatal trip in 2003 back to Damascus where he hoped to join the insurgency in Iraq and instead ended up as part of a two-man suicide cell operating on Hamas’ behalf in Tel Aviv.<sup>76</sup>

This is not a new narrative. Conflicts with a jihadist flavor attract idealistic young fighters who are sometimes redirected to other conflicts. At some point, if these fighters encounter certain groups or individuals, this energy can develop into plotting at home. Certainly this is not always the case, and most of those who go—either to fight or simply to do charity work—will return home and resume their lives. Yet the growing depth and complexity of the UK-Syria connection will perplex security services for years to come as they try to identify who is connected with Salafi-jihadi groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and who went for less nefarious reasons.

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## Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan’s New Cease-Fire Offer

By Imtiaz Ali

IN JANUARY 2013, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) released multiple statements offering a cease-fire to Pakistan’s government. Islamabad has not yet decided how to respond to the peace offer, which comes as the country enters a critical political phase of general elections in the coming months. The cease-fire offer led to intense discussion in Pakistani media outlets as well as in the corridors of power regarding how to respond to the TTP.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the past year, Pakistan’s military claims to have cleared many of the TTP’s strongholds in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).<sup>2</sup> The number of TTP suicide attacks decreased in 2012, leading some to suggest that it is a result of Pakistan’s military operations combined with persistent U.S. drone strikes in the FATA region.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the TTP reportedly increased targeted attacks on security forces, government installations and high-profile figures in 2012, suggesting this decline was instead due to a change in tactics.<sup>4</sup>

This article first explores the strength and changing tactics of the TTP. It then reviews the TTP’s cease-fire offer, as well as how Pakistan’s government might respond. It finds that while the TTP’s offer of peace talks has dominated the country’s headlines, its strategy of targeting security forces and progressive political parties suggests that it has no intention of entering into meaningful political engagement with the government of Pakistan.

### A Formidable Force

Today, the TTP is not only operational in the FATA region, but has active cells across the country, particularly in Punjab Province as well as in the port city of Karachi. While the TTP established a strong network in the sprawling city of Karachi years ago,<sup>5</sup> it recently also warned bus drivers in the eastern city of Lahore against showing vulgar movies or playing explicit songs during road trips.<sup>6</sup>

According to Pakistani officials, the TTP has also relied upon new bases for its fighters in neighboring Afghanistan, where they are able to hide during

**“While the TTP’s offer of peace talks has dominated the country’s headlines, its strategy of targeting security forces and progressive political parties suggests that it has no intention of entering into meaningful political engagement with the government of Pakistan.”**

Pakistani military operations in FATA. These officials allege that many of the TTP’s top commanders, as well as hundreds of fighters, are exploiting positions in Afghanistan’s Nuristan and Kunar provinces for cross-border attacks in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> The TTP has acknowledged this claim,<sup>8</sup> and the significant arrest of TTP commander Maulvi Faqir in Nangarhar Province in Afghanistan on February 18, 2013, reinforced these reports.<sup>9</sup>

72 Jeremy Britton, “Rowe ‘Bore al-Qaeda Hallmarks,’” BBC, September 23, 2005.

73 “Al Qaeda Exploits ‘Blue-Eyed’ Muslim Converts,” Reuters, October 11, 2005.

74 Martin Beckford, “Terrorist Supergrass Saajid Badat: The Shoe Bomber Who Got Cold Feet,” *Telegraph*, April 17, 2012.

75 Paul Cruickshank, “Transatlantic Shoe Bomber Knew Bin Laden,” CNN, April 20, 2012.

76 “World: Road to Martyrdom,” Journeyman Pictures, first broadcast on May 30, 2007.

1 Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Negotiate With the TTP?” *Express Tribune*, January 11, 2013.

2 “Pakistan Says Militant Bases Broken Up Near Afghan Border,” Reuters, January 30, 2013.

3 Yasir Rahman, “Pakistani Terrorist Attacks in 2012 Dropped, Report Says,” Central Asia Online, January 29, 2013.

4 Mahvish Ahmad, “Taliban Attack on Pakistani Airport Highlights Changed Tactics,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 12, 2012.

5 Salis bin Perwaiz, “Taliban in City Gaining Strength in Numbers,” *The News International*, November 3, 2012.

6 Asad Kharal, “TTP Warns Drivers Not to Play Obscene Music, Films,” *Express Tribune*, February 6, 2013.

7 Syed Irfan Ashraf, “TTP’s Pakistan Strategy,” *Dawn*, October 24, 2011.

8 Tahir Khan, “TTP Admits Having Safe Havens in Afghanistan,” *Express Tribune*, June 26, 2012.

9 “Top TTP Commander Maulvi Faqir Captured in Afghanistan: Officials,” *Dawn*, February 19, 2013.

Although the frequency of TTP suicide attacks has decreased, the militant group continues to execute a number of high-profile operations. In June 2012, more than 200 armed TTP militants in a convoy of 40 to 50 vehicles stormed a jail in Bannu city, setting free more than 350 inmates including the high-profile operative Adnan Rashid, who was convicted for trying to assassinate

**“The TTP might also now benefit from the killing of Maulvi Nazir, the leader of an anti-TTP Taliban faction who died in a U.S. drone strike on January 2, 2013.”**

former President Pervez Musharraf.<sup>10</sup> Just two months later, TTP militants attacked one of the country's most critical air force bases in the city of Kamra, the PAF Minhas Airbase. That gun battle, which lasted for five hours, left 10 people dead, including nine militants, and destroyed one aircraft in the base.<sup>11</sup> The militants managed to breach the highly secure facility.<sup>12</sup>

In mid-December 2012, the TTP brazenly carried out an attack on Peshawar International Airport that was made possible by its close coordination with foreign militants, most likely from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.<sup>13</sup> A week later, the TTP killed Bashir Bilour, a senior minister in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government. Bilour was a leader of the ruling Awami National Party (ANP), the progressive Pashtun nationalist party.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of December, in a sheer show of force, TTP militants kidnapped 23 soldiers from two checkpoints near Peshawar. Two days later, authorities found the bullet-ridden bodies of 21 of the kidnapped soldiers in a nearby town.<sup>15</sup> In January 2013, the TTP took responsibility for killing Manzar Imam—a member of the Sindh Provincial Assembly who belonged to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)—in Karachi.<sup>16</sup> The anti-Shi'a sectarian group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ) reportedly assisted the TTP in the attack, once again underscoring the links between the TTP and the LJ.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, contrary to reports of internal differences, the TTP has remained organizationally strong. For years, there have been frequent reports of infighting, especially between top commander Hakimullah Mehsud and his deputy, Waliur Rahman.<sup>18</sup> Yet these reports have proved consistently false. Hakimullah Mehsud still enjoys support of his top commanders and the TTP's *shura*, a committee of top TTP commanders who oversee and coordinate the group's activities.<sup>19</sup> His source of strength derives not only from his battlefield experience, but also his strong relations with Kashmiri and sectarian militant groups, as well as from Afghan Taliban factions such as the Quetta *shura* and the Haqqani network.<sup>20</sup>

The TTP might also now benefit from the killing of Maulvi Nazir, the leader of an anti-TTP Taliban faction who died in a U.S. drone strike on January 2, 2013.<sup>21</sup> Nazir's Taliban faction

and Hakimullah's TTP were rivals, and they occasionally attacked each other in South Waziristan Agency. Nazir shared a non-aggression pact with the Pakistani state, and Pakistan supported him in his fight against the TTP.<sup>22</sup> His death could weaken Pakistan's influence in South Waziristan Agency and allow the TTP to regroup and strengthen its position in this strategic FATA territory.

**The TTP's Cease-Fire Offer**

Despite the TTP's continued strength, in December 2012 Hakimullah Mehsud released a detailed video message offering a cease-fire and peace talks. Although refusing to disarm, the TTP leadership presented two conditions to the Pakistani government before peace talks could begin: 1) Pakistan should change its foreign policy by disassociating with the United

**“The TTP has not worried about public outrage in the past, which leads many to speculate that the TTP's cease-fire offer could be a tactical move given its timing and impossible peace conditions.”**

States, and design its foreign policy in conformity with Islamic laws; 2) Pakistan's constitution should be based on Shari'a.<sup>23</sup> The TTP nominated three politicians as guarantors for peace talks with the military. They include former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Maulana Fazul Rahman of Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam, and Munawar Hasan of Jamaat-i-Islami—all of these figures favor negotiations with the TTP.<sup>24</sup>

Waziristan Agency to conduct attacks in neighboring Afghanistan.

22 Rustam Shah Mohmand, “Mullah Nazir Death Will Change Nothing,” *The News International*, January 10, 2013.

23 Salim Safi, “Taliban Set Terms to Ceasefire,” *The News International*, December 27, 2012.

24 “Talking to the Taliban,” *Express Tribune*, February 5, 2013.

10 “Prison Break: Taliban Attack Bannu Jail, Nearly 400 Inmates Escape,” *Express Tribune*, April 15, 2012.

11 “Taliban Claim Attack on Minhas Base; Nine Militants Killed,” *Dawn*, August 16, 2012.

12 Ibid.

13 “Peshawar in Shock After Airport Attack,” *Dawn*, December 17, 2012; “Uzbek Militants Behind Peshawar Airport Attack,” *The Nation*, December 17, 2012.

14 Amir Mir, “TTP Killed Bilour to Avenge JUI-S Leader's Death,” *The News International*, December 24, 2012.

15 “Taliban Execute 21 Abducted Soldiers,” *The Nation*, December 30, 2012.

16 Shabbir H. Kazmi, “Pakistan: TTP Claims Responsibility for Killing MQM Legislator,” *Euro Asia News and Analysis*, January 18, 2013.

17 “TTP, LeJ Claim Killing of Manzar Imam,” *Central Asia Online*, January 18, 2013.

18 “Exclusive: Pakistan Taliban Commanders at Each Other's Throats,” *Reuters*, January 3, 2012; “FATA Annual Security Report 2012,” FATA Research Center, Islamabad, Pakistan, January 21, 2013.

19 “FATA Annual Security Report 2012”; Zahir Shah, “Hakimullah Mehsud Not to be Replaced: TTP,” *Dawn*, December 10, 2012.

20 Syed Zahir Shah, “TTP: Hakeemullah a Fiercely Ambitious Militant,” *World Analysis Net*, August 27, 2009.

21 Nazir's death is a significant success for the United States since his fighters used their sanctuaries in South



It is not clear what led the TTP leadership to offer a cease-fire, and there are different theories about the TTP's intentions. Some analysts link the TTP's fresh offer of peace talks with developments on the other side of the border in Afghanistan. According to this reasoning, just as the Afghan Taliban is offering to negotiate with the government of Afghanistan, the TTP also wants to negotiate with the government of Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> This effort may be the TTP's attempt to grab headlines and concessions in a rapidly changing situation in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region.

Others argue that the TTP has lost much support due to its recent actions, such as the attack on schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai, the teenager who stood up to the Taliban in her hometown of the Swat Valley.<sup>26</sup> In October 2012, TTP gunmen shot the 15-year-old Yousafzai in the head while she was on a school bus in Mingora.<sup>27</sup> The TTP was also criticized for the assassination of ANP leader Bashir Bilour. Although the TTP has killed more than 600 workers of the ANP, mostly in targeted attacks,<sup>28</sup> Bilour was one of the boldest figures among Pakistani politicians who have taken a clear stand against militancy, and he was the highest ranking ANP leader to die at the hands of the TTP. His assassination was widely condemned across the country.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the TTP has not worried about public outrage in the past, which leads many to speculate that the TTP's cease-fire offer could be a tactical move given its timing and impossible peace conditions. If past peace deals between the government and the TTP are any indication, then the TTP may be pursuing its previous strategy of buying time to regroup, before retaliating with more violence than before. Indeed, some argue that the TTP became stronger and more violent after similar agreements in the past.<sup>30</sup>

### Pakistan's Divided Response

Overall, Pakistan's response to the TTP threat, as well as the cease-fire offer, has been divided. On the military front, last month Pakistan announced for the first time that its "military doctrine" now considers internal threats the biggest national security priority.<sup>31</sup> This statement served as a major break from its decades-old India-centric security policy. Although it is not clear whether the latest paradigm shift in Pakistan's military doctrine is because of a warming of relations with India or if it is the realization that there is an existential threat to the state posed by militant groups, the announcement nonetheless has been received with a mixed response. There are some who have welcomed the new military doctrine, saying it is not too late to properly confront the internal threat.<sup>32</sup> Others, however, argue that this change in doctrine is not genuine, and that Pakistan will continue to pursue a weak strategy of countering homegrown militancy, precisely because the country's military and intelligence services allegedly collaborate with friendly Taliban factions as well as sectarian extremist groups.<sup>33</sup>

On the political front, the Pakistan Peoples Party government and almost all mainstream political and religious parties have now shown a willingness to talk to the TTP.<sup>34</sup> Although in the wake of ANP leader Bashir Bilour's assassination the ANP called the All Parties Conference to devise a joint strategy against the Taliban and terrorism, today the ANP favors negotiations with the TTP.<sup>35</sup> Pakistan's religious parties have always preferred an approach of appeasement when dealing with the Taliban, while the other mainstream parties have only gone so far as to condemn acts of violence, but not the perpetrators. After the cease-fire offer, many of the political and

religious parties agreed to talk to the TTP, but none of them have a clear strategy of how to proceed. The TTP has refused to lay down arms and has called the Pakistani system of governance "un-Islamic."<sup>36</sup>

As Pakistan enters election season after the dissolution of the present legislature in the middle of March, it seems unlikely that the military will launch a major operation against the TTP in the near future. The military may well choose to leave the decision to the next civilian government. For Pakistan to move forward on confronting the Pakistani Taliban, its military and political leadership need to develop a consensus on how to face the threat.<sup>37</sup> The TTP has so far cleverly exploited divisions within the country's political and military leadership. To achieve any progress, Pakistan will have to develop a coordinated policy toward the Pakistani Taliban before the group consolidates more power and increasingly challenges the state.

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With the Taliban," *CTC Sentinel* 5:9 (2012).

31 "Pakistan Army Sees 'Internal Threats' as Greatest Security Risk," *Dawn*, January 3, 2013.

32 "Changing Paradigm," *Express Tribune*, January 4, 2013.

33 Mohammad Taqi, "Anti-Terrorism Doctrine: Too Little, Too Late?" *Daily Times*, January 24, 2013.

34 "Malik Welcomes TTP Talks Offer," *The Nation*, February 4, 2013.

35 "ANP Sponsor Moot: Two Dozen Parties Endorse Peace Talks with Taliban," *Express Tribune*, February 15, 2013.

25 "Pakistan Taliban 'Holding Peace Talks with Government,'" *Daily Telegraph*, November 21, 2011.

26 Amir Rana, "Signs of Frustration," *Dawn*, October 21, 2012.

27 Ibid.

28 "ANP Lost 750 Activists in War Against Terror: Spokesman," *The News International*, April 9, 2012.

29 "Bashir Bilour's Assassination Widely Condemned," *The News International*, December 24, 2012.

30 Daud Khattak, "Reviewing Pakistan's Peace Deals

36 Ivan Watson, "Taliban: Pakistani Legal System Un-Islamic," CNN, April 22, 2009; "Pakistan Taliban Chief Hakimullah Mehsud Says Democracy is 'Un-Islamic,'" *Australian*, December 19, 2012.

37 Khadim Hussain, "Consensus on Terrorism," *Dawn*, January 28, 2013.

## The Significance of Maulvi Nazir's Death in Pakistan

By Zia Ur Rehman

ON JANUARY 2, 2013, a U.S. drone strike killed Maulvi Nazir in South Waziristan Agency in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).<sup>1</sup> Nazir, a senior Taliban commander, was closely aligned with the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Taliban faction, yet he had an antagonistic relationship with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).<sup>2</sup> Nazir was the leader of one of four major militant factions in FATA, and he was accused of sending fighters to neighboring Afghanistan to attack NATO and Afghan troops.<sup>3</sup> Yet unlike the TTP, Nazir was opposed to attacking targets inside Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> His refusal to attack Pakistan allowed the country's military to forge a non-aggression pact with his faction, which served Pakistan's strategy of isolating the TTP.<sup>5</sup>

Although Nazir's death will likely hurt the Afghan Taliban, it marks a positive development for the TTP. Nazir led one of the few militias willing to challenge the TTP, and his fighters engaged in occasional skirmishes with the group. The TTP even reportedly tried to assassinate Nazir in November 2012.<sup>6</sup> Unless Nazir's successor is able to project strength quickly, the TTP may be emboldened by the loss of this rival leader. This might place more pressure on Pakistan's security forces if Nazir's death enables the TTP to focus more resources against the Pakistani state.

This article examines Nazir's significance in Pakistan and Afghanistan, assesses the overall implications of his death for the United States and Pakistan, as well as provides a short profile of his successor, Bahawal Khan.

### Maulvi Nazir's Significance

Maulvi Nazir was born in 1975 in Birmel, a town in Afghanistan's Paktika Province, located only five-and-a-half miles from the Pakistan border.<sup>7</sup> He belonged to the Kakakhel tribe, a sub-clan of the Ahmedzai Wazir.<sup>8</sup> As is typical in the region, his family lived on both sides of the Durand Line separating Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> While in Birmel, Nazir reportedly studied at a religious seminary.<sup>10</sup> He later expanded on his studies as a student of Maulana Noor Muhammad at Darul Uloom Waziristan, located in Wana, South Waziristan Agency.<sup>11</sup>

He joined the Taliban movement in 1996 and fought against the Northern Alliance.<sup>12</sup> After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Nazir returned to Wana and became actively involved in supporting al-Qa`ida and Taliban activities in South Waziristan.<sup>13</sup> He was arrested by Pakistan's security forces in 2004, but was later released under the Shakai peace deal that was signed between Taliban commander Nek Muhammad and the Pakistan Army.<sup>14</sup>

After his release, Nazir moved back to Wana, where he became the top militant leader in the area by 2006-2007.<sup>15</sup> His network stretched into southwestern Afghanistan, to include Paktika,

Zabul, Helmand and up to Kandahar.<sup>16</sup> His fighters primarily consisted of members of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, who inhabit the western and southern areas of South Waziristan.<sup>17</sup> The modern guerrilla techniques employed by al-Qa`ida fighters inspired Nazir, who also worked on improving the skills of his own fighters.<sup>18</sup> In an interview, Nazir said that "al-Qa`ida and the Taliban are one and the same. At an operational level, we might have different strategies, but at the policy

**"For Pakistan, however, Nazir's death is more complicated. Pakistan's military and Nazir's faction were operating under a non-aggression pact, and violent incidents between the two were rare."**

level, we are one and the same."<sup>19</sup> A number of key al-Qa`ida leaders—such as Ilyas Kashmiri, Abu Khabab al-Masri, Osama al-Kini, Shaykh Ahmad Salim Swedan, and Abu Zaid al-Iraqi—were killed in U.S. drone strikes while reportedly under Nazir's protection.<sup>20</sup>

Nazir became the top militant leader in the Wana area after he successfully challenged local militant leaders Haji Sharif, Maulana Abbas and Haji Omar—all considered key supporters of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).<sup>21</sup> After establishing control in these areas in 2007, Nazir confronted the foreign Uzbek militant presence, accusing them of robbing and killing Ahmadzai Wazir tribesmen and imposing their self-styled Shari`a on local inhabitants.<sup>22</sup>

1 "Two Attacks Leave 12 Dead: 'Good Taliban' Maulvi Nazir Killed by Drone," *Dawn*, January 3, 2013.

2 "Pakistan Militant Mullah Nazir Killed 'in Drone Attack,'" BBC, January 3, 2013.

3 These factions are the Haqqani network, the Hafiz Gul Bahadur faction, the TTP, and Maulvi Nazir's faction.

4 He was closely allied with Hafiz Gul Bahadur, whose territory is in North Waziristan Agency. Bahadur's faction shares Maulvi Nazir's targeting selection, as they both choose to concentrate attacks in Afghanistan and not in Pakistan.

5 Personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a Pashtun journalist who has covered militancy in the region, January 5, 2013.

6 Amir Mir, "Key Taliban Coalition Falling Apart After Nazir Attack," *The News International*, December 5, 2012.

7 Chris Harnish, "Question Mark of South Waziristan: Biography and Analysis of Maulvi Nazir Ahmad," Critical Threats Project, July 17, 2009; "Profile: The 'Good' Taliban Leader," *Express Tribune*, January 4, 2012.

8 Zulfikar Ali, "Mullah Nazir's Death: New Taliban Chief Named in South Waziristan," *Express Tribune*, January 5, 2012.

9 Ibid.

10 "Profile: The 'Good' Taliban Leader."

11 Ibid.

12 Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Eviction or Safe Passage?" *Newsline*, May 10, 2007.

13 Personal interview, Wana-based journalist, January 5, 2013.

14 "Profile: The 'Good' Taliban Leader."

15 Personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a Pashtun journalist who has covered militancy in the region, January 5, 2013.

16 Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban and al-Qaeda: Friends in Arms," *Asia Times Online*, May 5, 2011.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Amir Mir, "Maulvi Nazir's Death Irks Security Establishment," *The News International*, January 4, 2013.

21 Mansoor Khan Mahsud, "The Battle for Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict in South Waziristan," New America Foundation, April 2010.

22 Adil Shahzeb, "The Mullah and the Military," *The Fri-*

With the support of his Ahmedzai Wazir tribe and the assistance of Pakistan's military, Nazir successfully flushed the Uzbek militants from Wana in 2007, an action that angered the TTP. Baitullah Mehsud had a long relationship with the IMU, even before he created the TTP. IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev offered his fighters to Baitullah when the latter decided to attack the Pakistani state.<sup>23</sup> The TTP provided sanctuary for the IMU in exchange for its assistance in

## **“Forging good relations with Nazir’s successor is likely Pakistan’s top priority so that peace can continue with the Ahmedzai Wazir of South Waziristan.”**

fighting Pakistani security forces.<sup>24</sup> As these local commanders and their allied Uzbek militants left the area, Nazir became the sole Taliban leader around Wana.<sup>25</sup>

Nazir's attack on the Uzbeks, as well as his disagreement with the TTP over attacking the Pakistani state, eventually caused conflict between Nazir's Taliban faction and the TTP.<sup>26</sup> In January 2008, fighting broke out between the two groups in South Waziristan.<sup>27</sup> Periodic skirmishes continue through the present day.<sup>28</sup> In November 2012, Nazir barely avoided death after a suicide bomber—thought to be from the TTP—tried to assassinate

him.<sup>29</sup> Yet his life was ultimately ended by a U.S. drone on January 2, 2013.

### **Implications for the United States and Pakistan**

U.S. officials and security analysts argue that Nazir's death will benefit the United States because he headed one of the three major militant groups in the Waziristan region that focus attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, as well as provide protection for al-Qa`ida fighters.<sup>30</sup> In 2009 and 2010, Nazir reportedly helped deploy hundreds of well-trained “Punjabi” Taliban militants of Pakistani origin inside Afghan territory to pressure U.S. and coalition forces ahead of their withdrawal.<sup>31</sup> One U.S. official told the *New York Times* that “while it is too soon to tell, the death of Nazir, along with some of his deputies, could push his network into disarray, degrading Al Qaeda's access to South Waziristan as a result.”<sup>32</sup>

For Pakistan, however, Nazir's death is more complicated. Pakistan's military and Nazir's faction were operating under a non-aggression pact, and violent incidents between the two were rare. Nazir was also at war with the TTP, the latter of which is Pakistan's primary domestic security threat.<sup>33</sup> Pakistan even offered support to Nazir's faction against the TTP.<sup>34</sup> Nazir's death could mean that the TTP can free up resources to attack Pakistani targets.<sup>35</sup>

Through the pro-government Nazir faction, Pakistan's military was trying to instigate a tribal uprising against the TTP in South Waziristan and flush out the TTP's Mehsud

militants from the territory, as well as increase disunity among all the Taliban groups.<sup>36</sup> The government has encouraged local tribesmen to form *lashkars* (tribal militias) to eliminate “hard-core al-Qa`ida elements and their affiliates especially the TTP,” who

## **“Others argue that Nazir’s killing will weaken his faction dramatically, and allow the TTP to take advantage in Wana.”**

have increasingly challenged the writ of the state by mounting deadly terrorist attacks inside Pakistan.<sup>37</sup> Forging good relations with Nazir's successor is likely Pakistan's top priority so that peace can continue with the Ahmedzai Wazir of South Waziristan.

### **Nazir's Successor: Bahawal Khan**

After Nazir's killing, Bahawal Khan (also known as Salahuddin Ayubi) was announced as the new chief of Wana's Taliban militants. Khan is reportedly a 34-year-old illiterate former bus driver.<sup>38</sup> He has long been a close associate of Nazir, as the two men fought together with the Taliban in Afghanistan before the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.<sup>39</sup> He was the Taliban commander for the Speen area of South Waziristan.<sup>40</sup> Although Qari Ziaur Rahman was Maulvi Nazir's deputy, the council of Wana-based militants agreed to nominate Khan because he is a veteran jihadist commander who remained close to Nazir. Khan initially refused to accept the leadership position, but agreed after elders and militant commanders in the area insisted he should become the new chief.<sup>41</sup>

*day Times*, January 11, 2013.

23 Amir Mir, “TTP Using Uzbeks to Conduct Terrorist Attacks,” *The News International*, December 18, 2012.

24 Ibid.

25 Personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a Pashtun journalist who has covered militancy in the region, January 5, 2013.

26 Iqbal Khattak, “Wazir Tribes Ratify New Militant Bloc,” *Daily Times*, July 9, 2008; personal interview, Pir Zubair Shah, a former *New York Times* reporter who is from South Waziristan, November 28, 2012.

27 Harnish.

28 See, for example, “Hakimullah's Men Clash with Nazir Group; Three Killed,” *Dawn*, August 19, 2010; “Clash Between Militants Groups Claimed Five People,” FATA Research Center, August 6, 2012.

29 Zia Ur Rehman, “Waziristan After Maulvi Nazir,” *The Friday Times*, January 11, 2013; Mir, “Key Taliban Coalition Falling Apart After Nazir Attack.”

30 The Pentagon said that Nazir's death would represent a “major development.” See Salman Masood and Ismail Khan, “Drone Kills a Pakistani Militant Behind Attacks on U.S. Forces,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2013; “Mullah Nazir's Death a ‘Major Development’: US,” *Express Tribune*, January 4, 2013.

31 M. Ilyas Khan, “Taliban's Mullah Nazir Death Spells Trouble for Pakistan,” BBC, January 3, 2013.

32 Masood and Khan.

33 Mir, “Maulvi Nazir's Death Irks Security Establishment.”

34 Ibid.

35 Personal interview, a Wana-based journalist, January 5, 2013.

36 Ibid.

37 Zia Ur Rehman, “Tribal Militias are Double-edged Weapon,” *The Friday Times*, September 30, 2011.

38 “Bahawal Khan to Succeed Pakistan Militant Leader Mullah Nazir,” BBC, January 4, 2013.

39 Ibid.

40 Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Shops, Markets in Wana Remain Closed Amid Tense Calm,” *The News International*, January 5, 2013.

41 Irfan Burki and Mushtaq Yousafzai, “Maulvi Nazir Among 10 Killed in Drone Strikes,” *The News International*, January 4, 2013.



Analysts describe Khan as more hot tempered than Nazir.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, some believe that Khan will be able to maintain cohesion within the ranks.<sup>43</sup> Others argue that Khan may prove less operationally or strategically important as Nazir, as he will have to live under constant threat of drone strikes.<sup>44</sup>

In the wake of Nazir's killing, some analysts say his successor and followers may now turn their guns on civilian and military targets in Pakistan because they suspect that Pakistan's security establishment is consenting to drone attacks.<sup>45</sup> According to this theory, one negative outcome from Nazir's death is that the peace agreement between the Pakistani government and Nazir's faction will collapse, and followers of Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan will join together with the TTP.<sup>46</sup> Such a development would be dangerous for Pakistan, although there is no evidence that this has occurred.<sup>47</sup>

Others argue that Nazir's killing will weaken his faction dramatically, and allow the TTP to take advantage in Wana.<sup>48</sup> Pakistan's military has struggled to maintain a strategic balance in the Waziristan region by entering into peace deals with some of the area's militant factions—with the goal of isolating the TTP. The loss of Nazir means that there will be less pressure from this group on the TTP, providing it with opportunities to strengthen and expand its presence and influence back into the Wana area of South Waziristan, which was previously dominated by Nazir.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

Nazir's death is a loss to the insurgency in neighboring Afghanistan, and it could also hurt the Afghan Taliban's sanctuaries in the Pakistani tribal region. For the United States, Nazir's death might weaken the insurgency in Afghanistan and also possibly damage Pakistan's strategy of negotiating with militant groups friendly to its interests.<sup>50</sup>

Nazir's death could be a contentious issue between Washington and Islamabad since the Pakistani military views commanders such as Nazir as useful in keeping the peace domestically. His death may now create a power vacuum, and possibly spark a tribal war that will leave Pakistan to deal with the consequent instability.

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## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

January 1, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded near a rally for the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi. The bomb killed four people. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility, adding that this was the first of a series of coming attacks on the MQM. – *Daily News & Analysis, January 1*

January 1, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen opened fire on charity workers involved in vaccinations and education in Swabi District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. Seven of the workers, including six women, were killed. – *Daily News & Analysis, January 1; BBC, January 29*

January 1, 2013 (ETHIOPIA): An Ethiopian court convicted 10 people of having links to al-Qa`ida, in what marked the first trial in the country for al-Qa`ida suspects. One of those convicted is a Kenyan national. – *AFP, January 1*

January 1, 2013 (NIGERIA): Nigerian troops killed 13 suspected Boko Haram militants in Maiduguri, Borno State. – *CNN, January 2*

January 2, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed Maulvi Nazir, a top Taliban leader, in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Nazir was responsible for sending Taliban fighters across the border into Afghanistan to fight Afghan and coalition forces. He did not, however, attack targets inside Pakistan, and he had signed a peace treaty or non-aggression pact with the Pakistani government. Nazir's Taliban faction frequently skirmished with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, which is anti-Pakistan and also operates out of South Waziristan Agency. Nazir's death is considered a blow to Taliban militants who use South Waziristan Agency as a sanctuary from which to execute attacks on soldiers in Afghanistan. – *Reuters, January 3*

January 3, 2013 (UNITED STATES): British authorities extradited Abid Naseer to the United States to face charges for his alleged role in a

42 Personal interview, Ijaz Khan, a Peshawar-based security analyst, January 12, 2013.

43 "Bahawal Khan to Succeed Pakistan Militant Leader Mullah Nazir."

44 Shahzeb.

45 Taha Siddiqui, "Good Taliban, Bad Taliban? Pakistani Commander's Killing Exposes Blurry Lines," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 5, 2013.

46 Shamim Shahid, "Luck Runs Out for Mullah Nazir," *Pakistan Today*, January 4, 2013.

47 Ibid.

48 Personal interview, Ijaz Khan, a Peshawar-based security analyst, January 12, 2013.

49 Personal interview, Ahmed Wali Mujeeb, a Pashtun journalist who has covered militancy in the region, January 5, 2013.

50 Personal interview, a retired Pakistani military officer, January 5, 2013.

planned al-Qa`ida suicide bomb plot targeting New York City subways in 2009. According to the Associated Press, U.S. federal prosecutors said that they aim to “prove that Naseer collected bomb ingredients, conducted reconnaissance and was in frequent contact with other Al Qaeda operatives as part of a foiled New York plot and a second suspected plot to bomb a busy shopping area in the northern English city of Manchester.” – *Reuters, January 3; Associated Press, January 3*

January 3, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least 27 Shi`a Muslims at a bus station in Mussayab, 40 miles south of Baghdad. According to the *New York Times*, “The apparent targets were pilgrims returning from the holy city of Karbala, where Shiites observe the end of the 40-day annual mourning period for the death of Imam Hussein ibn Ali, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.” – *Reuters, January 3; New York Times, January 3*

January 3, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed three suspected militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Among those killed was Shah Faisal, identified as a commander for Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. – *Los Angeles Times, January 3*

January 3, 2013 (YEMEN): A suspected U.S. drone killed three al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula fighters in Bayda Province, including a “senior figure.” – *al-Jazeera, January 4*

January 3, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb exploded at a fuel station in Damascus, killing at least 11 people. – *The Times, January 4*

January 4, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Polish and Afghan forces captured Mullah Abdul Kabir, identified as a senior leader in the Afghan Taliban. – *UPI, January 7*

January 6, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Two suicide bombers attacked a meeting of tribal elders at a government compound in Spin Boldak, Kandahar Province, killing five people. The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility. – *Voice of America, January 6*

January 6, 2013 (PAKISTAN): U.S. drones killed at least 12 militants in South Waziristan Agency near the Afghan border. According to reports, some of the dead were members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, while others were described as being members of Punjabi militant groups. – *Australian, January 7*

January 7, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A member of the Afghan Army shot and killed a British soldier at a military base in Helmand Province. – *BBC, January 8*

January 8, 2013 (FRANCE): A French court sentenced Irfan Demirtas to eight years in prison for heading an effort to fund the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, an al-Qa`ida-linked terrorist group. – *Wall Street Journal, January 8*

January 8, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed eight suspected militants near Mir Ali, North Waziristan Agency. – *Voice of America, January 8*

January 9, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani police arrested five alleged Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan members suspected of killing female polio vaccinators and planning to attack Karachi airport. – *Dawn, January 9*

January 10, 2013 (PAKISTAN): An explosion tore through the Tablighi Markaz in the Swat Valley, killing 22 members of Tablighi Jama`at. It was unclear whether the explosion was an accident, or if a suicide bomber was responsible. – *The News International, January 11*

January 10, 2013 (YEMEN): Yemeni tribal leader Ali Abdul Salam, who mediated between the government and al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), was killed by armed men in an ambush in Abyan Province. Authorities blamed AQAP. – *Reuters, January 10*

January 10, 2013 (MALI): Islamist militants in control of northern Mali pushed further south, successfully seizing the town of Konna, just 40 miles from Mopti. Mopti is the last garrison town that protects the road to the country's capital, Bamako. Among the ranks of the militants are

members of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. – *Telegraph, January 11*

January 11, 2013 (MALI): French military forces intervened in northern Mali, attacking Islamist militants who control the north. French and Malian forces managed to retake the town of Konna, which the militants overran on January 10. Among the ranks of the militants are members of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. French President Francois Hollande said, “I have decided that France will respond without delay and alongside our partners, to the request of the Malian authorities. We will do it strictly in the framework of UN Security Council resolutions and we are ready to stop the terrorist offensive if it continues.” – *Telegraph, January 11*

January 11, 2013 (IRAQ): At least 12 prisoners, including members of al-Qa`ida in Iraq, escaped from Taji prison, 15 miles from Baghdad. Some of the escapees were on death row. – *RFE/RL, January 11*

January 11, 2013 (SOMALIA): French forces launched a rescue attempt to save Denis Alex, a member of France's General Directorate for External Security (DGSE), who had been held by al-Shabab since July 14, 2009, in Somalia. A fierce gunfight erupted during the rescue attempt, in which two French soldiers and 17 militants were killed. French authorities said that Denis Alex was killed during the failed raid. Al-Shabab, however, claimed that Alex survived the raid, and on January 17 they announced his execution in retaliation for the French military operation. – *CNN, January 12*

January 12, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) chief Hakimullah Mehsud circulated a leaflet calling for an end to the TTP's attacks on Pakistani soldiers in North Waziristan Agency. The cease-fire, however, does not apply to the rest of Pakistan. – *Reuters, January 13*

January 13, 2013 (PAKISTAN): An improvised explosive device detonated near a Pakistani military convoy in North Waziristan Agency, killing 16 soldiers. According to Reuters, “A spokesman for the Mujahideen Ansar, a group dominated by Uzbek

fighters, claimed responsibility and told Reuters the attack was retaliation for the Pakistani army's complicity in drone strikes. The group is allied to Pakistan Taliban fighters." – *NBC News, January 13; Reuters, January 13*

January 13, 2013 (NIGERIA): Nigeria's military captured Mohammed Zangina, identified as a top Boko Haram member, in Maiduguri, Borno State. Zangina is reportedly a member of Boko Haram's *shura* committee, the group's governing body. – *CNN, January 13*

January 14, 2013 (YEMEN): Yemeni security forces arrested two members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula near Sana`a, recovering suicide bomb vests, assassination manuals, explosives, and lists of targets for attack. – *Reuters, January 14*

January 15, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): The Afghan Taliban released a statement condemning France's recent military intervention in Mali. According to the statement, "When France began its withdrawal process from Afghanistan in recent times it seemed as the French government would likely expand its anti-war stance to other regions in the world. However it broke off its commitment to peace by transgressing militarily on the soil of northern African nation of Mali." The Afghan Taliban warned that the intervention will be "not only disastrous for Mali but also for France." – *AAP, January 15*

January 15, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed Iraqi lawmaker Efam al-Esawi, a member of the Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc, in Anbar Province. The lawmaker's bodyguard was killed as well. The Islamic State of Iraq took responsibility, describing al-Esawi as an "arrogant criminal." – *Reuters, January 15; AFP, January 21*

January 15, 2013 (SYRIA): Two explosions tore through the Syrian city of Aleppo, killing more than 80 people. The blasts occurred between the University of Aleppo's halls of residence and the architecture faculty on the first day of exams. According to the BBC, "State TV said 'terrorists' had launched rockets at the campus, but activists blamed missiles fired by warplanes." – *BBC, January 15*

January 15, 2013 (YEMEN): A senior Yemeni official said that a Finnish couple and an Austrian man who were abducted in Yemen by tribesmen last month have been sold to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP reportedly moved the hostages to Bayda Province. – *Reuters, January 15*

January 16, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): An estimated six militants attacked a building belonging to Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Kabul, killing an Afghan security guard. According to the BBC, "The NDS said that one suicide attacker drove a minibus which exploded outside the NDS building. Five others, armed with semi-automatic weapons and hand grenades, then fought the security forces for 15 minutes before being killed by guards." – *BBC, January 16*

January 16, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a truck filled with explosives targeted the Kurdistan Democratic Party headquarters in Kirkuk, killing at least 25 people. – *Reuters, January 16*

January 16, 2013 (ALGERIA): Militants attacked a BP natural gas facility in Algeria, taking dozens of foreigners and Algerians hostage. The militants, who referred to themselves as al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam (Those Who Sign with Blood), identified their leader as Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Belmokhtar released a video dated January 17 in which he claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that "we at al-Qa`ida are responsible for this operation, which we bless." He further said, "We are ready to negotiate with the West and the Algerian regime provided that [they stop] the attack and bombardment against the Muslim people of Mali... and respect their desire to implement Shari'a in their territory." On January 17, Algerian security forces opened fire on militants attempting to escape with hostages. Security forces finally took control of the facility on January 19. Although nearly 700 Algerian workers and more than 100 foreigners escaped, initial reports suggested that at least 48 hostages were killed during the four-day siege. – *Voice of America, January 17; Reuters, January 20*

January 17, 2013 (UNITED STATES): A federal judge, citing lack of evidence, acquitted one of two south Florida imams accused of sending more than \$50,000 to the Pakistani Taliban. Izhar Khan was freed from jail after the decision. – *Reuters, January 17*

January 17, 2013 (SOMALIA): The United States granted official recognition to the Somali government in Mogadishu for the first time in two decades. – *CNN, January 17*

January 17, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan gunmen assassinated Manzar Imam, a provincial lawmaker belonging to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), in the Orangi neighborhood of Karachi. According to police, "A member of the Sindh provincial assembly was killed with three of his guards when gunmen on two motorcycles intercepted his car in Orangi neighborhood and shot them with automatic weapons." – *Dawn, January 17*

January 18, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Pakistan reportedly plans to release all Afghan Taliban prisoners currently in detention, including the group's former second-in-command, Mullah Baradar. The prisoner release is part of reconciliation efforts in neighboring Afghanistan. Pakistani officials did not specify when the detainees would be freed. – *Reuters, January 18*

January 19, 2013 (YEMEN): An explosion tore through a house in Bayda Province, killing more than 10 suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. Militants reportedly used the home for assembling bombs, and authorities suspect that the explosion was accidental. – *Reuters, January 20; Voice of America, January 20*

January 19, 2013 (YEMEN): Suspected U.S. drones killed three alleged militants in Marib Province. – *Reuters, January 20*

January 20, 2013 (YEMEN): Suspected U.S. drones killed three alleged militants in Marib Province, marking the second set of drone strikes in the province in two days. – *Reuters, January 20*



January 21, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants stormed the headquarters of Kabul's traffic police. According to CNN, "A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at the entrance gate of the traffic police compound. Two or three attackers then managed to charge inside the main building, armed with machine guns and more explosives." Other reports suggested that there were multiple suicide bombings. At least three people were killed. – *CNN, January 21; NBC News, January 21; CBS News, January 21*

January 21, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed a number of pro-Assad militiamen in Hama Province. Jabhat al-Nusra, a Salafi-jihadi rebel group, claimed responsibility. – *AP, January 28*

January 21, 2013 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone killed three suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in Marib Province. According to the Associated Press, "security officials said the five targeted Monday were traveling in a pickup truck when it was hit in Marib, about 25 miles outside its main city with the same name. Two were killed on site, while another died hours later of his wounds...Two of those killed were identified as Ali Saleh Toaiman and Qassim Nasser Toaiman...the third was identified as Ahmed al-Ziadi." – *New York Daily News, January 21; AP, January 21*

January 21, 2013 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram militants attacked hunters selling bush meat in Damboa, Borno State, killing 18 people. According to the BBC, "strict Muslims are forbidden to eat this type of bush meat," which consists of meat from monkeys and pigs. – *BBC, January 22*

January 22, 2013 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded near an army camp in the town of Taji, Baghdad Province, killing seven people. – *al-Jazeera, January 22*

January 22, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed five people at an army checkpoint in Mahmudiyah, Babil Province. – *al-Jazeera, January 22*

January 22, 2013 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone killed four suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in al-Jawf Province. – *Reuters, January 22*

January 22, 2013 (PHILIPPINES): Abu Sayyaf Group militants ambushed the Philippines elite Army Scout Rangers in Basilan Province, wounding seven of them. – *Philippine Inquirer, January 22*

January 23, 2013 (GLOBAL): Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the brother al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, sanctioned violence against the West in reaction to the French-led military offensive in northern Mali. "All Muslims have the right to stop this aggression by any means," he said in an interview with the Associated Press in Cairo. "They [the West] are making jihadists." According to the Associated Press, "Al-Zawahiri, who is the younger brother of the al-Qaeda leader, was imprisoned for nearly 12 years under Egypt's former president, Hosni Mubarak, including four years in solitary confinement. He was tortured during his time in prison, before eventually being freed after Mubarak's ouster. Since his release, he has been appearing in street protests in defense of Shariah... and on Friday he was among some 200 ultraconservative Islamists and former jihadis who staged a protest in front of the French Embassy in Cairo." – *AP, January 23*

January 23, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber disguised as a mourner killed an estimated 42 people during funeral services inside a Shi`a mosque in Tuz Khurmatu, Salah al-Din Province. – *Reuters, January 23; AFP, January 23*

January 23, 2013 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone killed six suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula near Sana`a. – *Reuters, January 23*

January 24, 2013 (YEMEN): A Yemeni government statement said that Said al-Shihri, second-in-command of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, has died of wounds sustained during a U.S. drone attack in November 2012. It was not clear when he actually died. Al-Shihri, a Saudi national, was detained in 2001 by Pakistan and turned over to U.S. custody. He was imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay for six years,

before being released to Saudi Arabia to participate in a rehabilitation program for militants. He then ended up in Yemen fighting for al-Qa`ida. – *Voice of America, January 24; AP, January 24; ABC News, January 22*

January 25, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed five people in Kapisa Province. The Taliban said they attempted to attack a NATO convoy, but the bomber missed the convoy and crashed into a house. – *CNN, January 25; RFE/RL, January 25*

January 25, 2013 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab's Twitter account was suspended after it was used to threaten to kill Kenyan hostages. According to the BBC, "Twitter refused to comment on the suspension but its rules say that threats of violence are banned." – *BBC, January 25*

January 26, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed 10 policemen in a square in Kunduz city in northern Afghanistan. Abdullah Zemarai, the head of the local police counterterrorism department, was among the dead, as well as Sayyed Aslam Sadat, the head of the traffic police. – *New York Times, January 26*

January 26, 2013 (PAKISTAN): An estimated 300 Pakistani Taliban militants attacked the Ansaarul Islam pro-government militia in the Maidan area of Tirah in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. During the clashes, which lasted for days, at least 71 fighters on both sides were killed. – *Reuters, January 26; Dawn, January 27*

January 26, 2013 (MALI): French forces were in control of parts of Gao, northern Mali's most populous city, after retaking the city from Islamist militants. – *McClatchy Newspapers, January 26*

January 27, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed 10 people on a police truck in Kandahar. Eight of the dead were police, and two were detainees. – *New York Times, January 26*

January 28, 2013 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed 11 soldiers at a military checkpoint in Ra`da, Bayda Province. – *Bloomberg, January 28*

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January 29, 2013 (SOMALIA): A suicide bomber detonated explosives inside the presidential palace compound in Mogadishu, killing two people. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. – *AP, January 29; al-Arabiya, January 29*

January 31, 2013 (IRAQ): The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) called on Sunni protesters to take up arms against Shi'a Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. According to Reuters, "Thousands of Sunni Muslims have rallied mostly in the western province of Anbar since December over frustrations they have been sidelined since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003." The ISI said, "You have two options, not three: either kneel before the apostates, though that will be impossible, or to take up arms." – *Reuters, January 31*